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Little gate

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LITTLE GATE



# Little Gate

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*by Annemarie Ewing*

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*TO HARRIET WOLF*

without whose creative encouragement  
LITTLE GATE, like a latter-day Orpheus,  
would still be buried away in the Hades  
of a top drawer. . . .

LITTLE GATE



## Chapter I

WHEN JOE GOT HOME FROM SCHOOL, HIS mother and Hazel had this blue stuff spread out all over the dining-room table, all over the top of the sideboard, all over the sewing machine. They were making more racket even than the girls decorating the gym at school. The sewing machine clicking like a cheap clock gone crazy. His mother's foot thump-thumping the pedal. Hazel whacking away as if the scissors were two slats banging together.

"Never mind killing yourselves," Joe said. "I'm not taking her to the dance if you get the dress done or if you don't!"

"Joey, you promised!"

"I did not!"

"You did, too!"

"Mom promised, you mean."

"I can't go by myself, Joey."

"I don't care if you can or you can't. I'm not taking you."

"Joey, you're *mean*!"

"Stop yapping—and stop calling me Joey!"

His mother straightened up from the sewing machine. She looked the way Hazel would look in twenty years. Her nose was the same sharp nose, her mouth the same soft, moist, pink-chewing-gum mouth, her face the same flesh-colored taffy face. Only his mother's hair was different, dyed black. And his mother's body was thick and awkward while Hazel's still had that sixteen-year-old look of straight lines reaching into curves. You could tell they were mother and daughter all right, not stepmother and stepson, like him.

"Oo shuh huh, Oh Heh-heh," his mother said. Then she took the pins out of her mouth. "You're takin' your sistatha



party and don'you fahget it. I won'have her runnaroun' the streetsa Muscatine at night byreself. Your sistaza lady whatever you may be. I dohwanna hear any more talk about it and I dohwanna see you rounhere now, undafoot. Where's thother sleeve, honey?"

"Geez!" said Joe and went out to the kitchen. The racket began again, the clicking and the thumping and the whacking. Joe shut the kitchen door. He cut himself a big chunk of bread, spread it with apple butter from the crock, and began to munch.

In the school gymnasium he had just left there was this racket, too. Girls hanging up crepe-paper decorations and hammering and squealing and giggling. "Now you look out, Joey Geddes. Don't you spoil our decorations!"

Both rackets made him sick. High school dances made him sick. The orchestra from the Opera House playing *San* and *Love Nest* and *I Love You*. The fiddle taking the melody the way they did it at square dances. And that saxophone player. Every time he used the octave key it sounded like somebody drawing a finger across a blackboard.

"Joe!"

Geez, a fellow couldn't have a minute's peace.

"Joe, you come here this minute!"

He walked to the door as slowly as he could and opened it a crack.

"I don't care what you say, I'm not going to take her to that dance."

"Nevamin' that now. I just runouta blue thread. You run down t'Ogilvie's and getaspool, num'thirty. Herezasample. Remembanow, num'thirty."

"Why can't Hazel go? It's her dress."

"I need Hazelta try on. Whydya havtamake sucha fuss about everything I askyata do, Joe?"

All women and girls sounded like his mother to Joe. Shrill and peevish and highpitched. Except Mame Wilson. Mame sounded rich and deep and restful. But all other women and

girls, their voices got shrill and peevish and highpitched and you had to do what they wanted to get out of their way.

"Okay, okay. Gimme the money."

"Hazel, get Joe a nickel outatha top drawerintha side-board."

He clattered down the rickety front steps and turned into the mud road that led to Mrs. Ogilvie's corner store. There were houses only on the Geddes side of the street. On the opposite side the hill went on down to the streetcar track. Down there, beyond the end of the car track, was the tomato factory. Some men were painting the factory white. Joe watched one man climb up to the big pickle on the roof and start painting the "57" on it. Then he scuffed his way along the road, whistling the *St. Louis Blues* vigorously, with variations, till he came to the top of the Path. Here he stopped and listened.

Mame's shack slanted precariously downhill, only a hundred feet below him. And from the open window of the shack came the sound of a piano. Mame Wilson was playing *Runnin' Wild*, in stop time the way the Dixieland Jazz Band played. She finished one chorus and started on another. In this new chorus, after every place that went *Runnin' Wild* in the words, she played a swell break, different each time, the way Cozy had showed them.

Excitement went through Joe like a sudden swallow of ice water. It was always like that. All that had to happen was for him to hear Mame or Cozy play and the music took possession of him. It was like going into a room and shutting the door. Other things didn't exist any more. The music shut them out. His blood began to run through his veins in the same tempo as the music. The music was just his blood moving along so he could hear it. Or his breath. His blood in his veins and his breath in his lungs. He became aware of his blood and his breath as living things inside him. He turned down the Path.

There was a low fence around the shack with a gate that

reached just to Joe's knees. The latch fell back into place with a little click behind him. He went slowly up the walk, up the two front steps, and on in without knocking. He didn't think he'd made any noise, but the music stopped and Mame turned round on the piano stool.

"Hi, Joey," she said and her voice was deep and soothing in a way that rested him. "I was expectin' Cozy."

"He in town?"

"Must be. They's his horn."

"Geez, that's great!"

Cozy was the one who taught him things about the saxophone, things that helped make the horn come alive in Joe's mouth. Cozy played on Mississippi River boats. He had once played on a boat with Louis Armstrong himself. Cozy was Mame's brother. He was Joe Geddes' hero.

"Don't stop playing, Mame. Will he be here soon?"

She got up from the piano stool.

"I gotta stop. Gotta get Cozy and Pug some supper. They goin' to Iowa City tonight to hear some white boys play. From Chicago. Some cornet player they call Jig. Plays good horn, they say."

Mame was a big Negress, black as the coal stove in the corner. Her hair was short and stood out in stiff wisps from her forehead. When she laughed, her red tongue and her white teeth were bright banners in her ebony face. Joe liked to watch Mame laugh. He liked to hear Mame laugh, too, and he liked it that she laughed easily and a lot. She laughed now as she went over to the stove and started stirring something in a big pot. Then she opened the oven door carefully. She had to do it carefully because the oven door was tied on with a piece of rope. When she opened it, the warm fragrance of pork floated through the room.

It wasn't much of a room. It had a bed in it, a table and three chairs, an old rocker, the stove and the piano. A couple of rag rugs from the dime store on the floor. Some cheap scrim curtains at the two windows. Pictures out of the

Chicago *Defender* nailed up all over the walls. Louis Armstrong. Duke Ellington. Papa Joe Oliver. Bessie Smith. Musicians. Musicians of Mame's race. Joe knew them all, knew the stories about them by heart. Beyond the stove, there was a portière over a kind of lean-to where Cozy slept when he was home.

In the corner farthest from the stove, a phonograph with an old-fashioned horn stood on a rickety table. Records were stacked neatly in an orange crate beside it.

"Mind if I play the phonograph and wait for Cozy, Mame?"

"Go right ahead, Joey."

The record on the machine was one of King Oliver's. *Dipper Mouth Blues*. Joe wound up the machine and started the turntable going. The room came to life under the hot impact of the music. Joe began to tap his foot and Mame swayed over the coal stove.

"Thass Louie!" she said when Armstrong squeezed down hard on four notes at the end of a phrase. Both of them laughed out loud when Baby Dodds shouted "Play that thing!" just before the end of the record.

Joe took *Dipper Mouth* off the machine and put on *Alligator Hop*. Then he picked out Bessie Smith's *Careless Love* and *Empty Bed Blues* and put them in a careful pile beside him. He made his choices with the serious, concentrated air of a child putting one block on top of the other.

"They's a new record there," Mame called over to him. "Cozy brought it with him. *Jazz Me Blues*. Look on the piano."

Joe looked and found the new record. It could come after Bessie. He was quieted as soon as the music began to scratch from the worn records. He had already learned to listen to this music like a musician, with a nonchalant absorption that didn't miss a note. He knew most of Mame's records by heart. He memorized the notes so he could play them on his saxophone at school after orchestra practice. He had to do

something to get the taste of *Poet and Peasant* out of his mouth. *Poet and Peasant* and its taste of vanilla sawdust. He had to bite into good, strong roast beef. *Tiger Rag*. *Dipper Mouth*. *Careless Love*.

Bessie's voice sang off the wax now with good, honest strength:

“Love, oh love, oh care-liss love,  
All my hap-puh-ness I've lef'  
You fill my heart with these wa-ry old blues,  
Now I'm walkin', talkin' to myse'f.”

Joe understood in some wordless place in his mind that the music was good because it caught and released its feeling in the simplest, most direct way. His musician's ear knew it was good, listening to the way she wove the tune, like a living thing, around the regular pulse of the rhythm. He never tried memorizing what Bessie sang. He knew, without understanding it, that where she hesitated on a word, where she dragged a word out, where she deviated from a solid tone, had to do with her own musical logic which she could not teach him. He would have to find his own.

He went through the Bessie Smith records with great satisfaction. Then he was ready to hear the new record. *Jazz Me Blues*. With Bix Beiderbecke. He played it twice. He noticed that the saxophone had no better tone than his own. He listened to the clarinet solo, found it shrill and sharp, noted when the guy made an off-key entrance. He listened for the thing that excited him most—a cornet break. It was three groups of six notes each, sounds so liquid and pure that they came tumbling out of the horn like poetry, like the poised grace of a cat springing, like the elusive delight of a lilac's smell, there only when you breathed in.

Joe played the break twice, finding the place carefully on the record. Then again. Again. Again. . . .

“Well, if it ain't my old pal Joey!”

He turned and saw Cozy beside him and was filled with an awkward shyness.

"H'lo, Cozy," he said and played Bix's break again to hide his shyness.

Cozy had a man with him, a man with tremendous shoulders and a short, wide face, funny alongside Cozy's bean-pole skinniness.

"This here's Joey, the kid I been telling you about, Pug. He plays good sax. You like that cornet, Joey?"

Before Joe could answer, Mame came over and slapped the man Pug across his big shoulders.

"Pug Johnson, what you mean, comin' here to take Cozy away again?"

"All I come for is to eat your cookin'."

"Never mind that St. Louey sweet talk. You come to hear this white boy band like Cozy said."

Mame laughed, though. She wasn't mad or anything.

"I gotta eat. I gotta eat quick, too. I been driving since last night."

"He borried a car," Cozy explained.

Joe wished he belonged and could take part in this casual talk. He couldn't remember when he had felt he really belonged anywhere. Certainly not at home where everything that seemed right and natural to him was considered "common" by his mother. Well, his stepmother. He hardly ever saw his tall, clumsy, straw-haired father. He was at the button factory all day working and in town all night drinking beer. At school the girls thought Joe Geddes ugly and awkward and the fellows thought him a sissy. The only time he felt safe was when he got to orchestra practice early enough to play things Cozy had taught him on the saxophone that belonged to the school. Then he felt safe from the feeling of not belonging, safe from the loneliness, safe from his mother's peevish voice, from his father's indifference, from his sister Hazel's sticky dependence.

Geez! The thread for Hazel's dress. He felt in his pocket for the nickel. It was still there.

"Say, I gotta go," he said loudly to interrupt the easy flow of their soft, laughing voices.

"What's your hurry?" Cozy said.

"I gotta go get some—I gotta run an errand for my mother."

He was ashamed to talk about so ladylike a thing as thread in front of his hero. They looked at him as if they had forgotten he was there.

"Listen, I gotta go," Joe said again.

"Hey, Joey, wait. Want to come along tonight and hear the band? Pug gonna drive us up to Iowa City. Leave 'bout seven o'clock."

Halfway to the door, Joe stopped, stunned. They were asking him to go and hear this band, way up in Iowa City!

"Geez!" he said softly. "I can't."

They looked at him, not understanding the difficulty.

"I gotta take my sister to a high school dance!" he blurted out.

"Thass tough, Joey," Cozy said with easy acceptance.

"I don't want to do it. I said I wouldn't—but—but I don't know."

"Okay, Joey. You do what you can. You can come, you meet us up at the car on the road 'bout seven. Good luck, boy."

"Thanks," said Joe.

He ran up the Path, down the road to Mrs. Ogilvie's. Why couldn't everybody take things easy the way Cozy did? He made you feel like a grownup the easy way he took things.

A bell jangled when he pushed open the door of the store. Mrs. Ogilvie sat behind the cluttered counter, knitting under a feeble gas light. She pushed up her square-rimmed spectacles and peered at Joe from behind a box of soap.

"Spoolthreadnum'thirty," said Joe, fumbling in his pocket for the sample. "This here color." It was gone. "Geez! I had it here somewheres."

The old lady's cracked and uncertain voice said to him, "You lookin' for the sample, Joey?"

"I had it here somewheres."

He hated to be teased and he hated to be called Joey by people who made it sound like he was a baby or wasn't doing something he should be doing. She knew darned well he couldn't find the sample.

"Your sister Hazel was down here about a half hour ago and got the thread, Joey."

"Hazel was?"

"She was here about a half hour ago."

"Oh. Well, then, thanks."

He turned and ran out, jangling the little bell over the door fiercely. What right had they to send him on such baby errands? Did they think he had nothing better to do than run around buying thread for dresses for his sister to wear to silly old high school dances? That he had to take her to? He wouldn't do it. He didn't know how he wouldn't do it, but he just wouldn't! He stopped running in front of the Dubrowsky's house next door and walked up his front steps as nonchalantly as he could manage.

A heavy odor of onions and cabbage came from the steaming kitchen and hung limply, protestingly, above the ruffles and sashes and blue stuff all over the dining room. His mother was just coming through the kitchen door.

"Set the tablintha kitchen, honey," she said, putting her hand to her damp forehead. "My eyezer *killin'* me!"

"I'm *tired*, Mamma."

"Well, whaddaya think I—"

She saw him and stopped on the brink of a whine.

"Joe Geddes!"

He tried to edge toward the hall that led up to his room.

"Joe Geddes, where you been? We waitednwaitedenwaitened, your sistran me. We coulda been through by now, but no. We hadtawait while you frittered away your time. Where *were* you?"

"Oh, I was just . . . I just stopped to talk to some—some fellows."



"Nevamin'. I know where you were. Down with those good-for-nothin' common niggers. I'm at thendamy rope, Joe Geddes. I been patient. For ten years, I been patient. But thiztha last straw. I slavenwork to keep you decent and whaddaya do? Runaroun' with niggers! You just lissentathis, Joe Geddes. Don't you ever lemme catch you with those niggers again. I'm gonnahave some obeedyance aroun' here."

The kitchen door opened and Joe heard his father's heavy step.

"Maggie!"

"Oh, merciful heavens! Your father!"

"Supper ready, Maggie?"

His mother went out to the kitchen and Joe dashed upstairs to get away from her shrill, complaining voice. Hazel's little echo followed him. "Yes, and when Mamma pressed your good suit, too!"

He closed the door of his room, but he could still hear her voice, shrill and complaining, telling his father about him. Even this far away, through the closed door, he could hear her voice and it set up in him a helpless fury, like out-of-tune playing. He sat down on the chair beside his bed. He felt shaken and tired, as if he had been beaten all over. He saw his good suit hanging there on the closet door. It was his good suit because it had short pants and he never wore it unless specifically forced to do so. It was almost as good as new but he had to wear it out, his mother said, before they'd buy him one with long pants for good. Why did he have to wear his good suit to the dance tonight? Why did he have to go to the dance at all? If his sister Hazel really wanted to go to the dance to dance, she could go by herself, couldn't she? He couldn't dance. They said he had no sense of rhythm. He knew darned well why. He knew darned well that the reason he had to take Hazel to the dance was not because Hazel wanted to dance. It was because his mother wanted Hazel to meet some of those swell fellows from the other side of town that she'd never meet outside of school any other way. He

didn't care if he never met them himself. His tortured mind saw himself in the gym tonight in short pants and Hazel beside him with all that blue stuff on. The picture was so revolting that it produced a slight nausea in him.

"Joe!"

He stiffened in his chair and said, "Yes, ma'am."

"You washyahans and come down here to supper. Heavn-only knows what you pick up from those niggers!"

He washed his hands and went down to supper. His mother sat at the end of the kitchen table near the sink with a white rag tied around her head.

"That Annie Platt's gettin' too oltawork anyhow," she was saying to his father. "No wonder she's always havnanaccident. Sev'ntasix, sev'ntasix, sev'ntasix, six days a week. At her age!"

Joe's mother felt contempt for all the women she used to work with in the button factory. She had escaped by her marriage. She was a lady because she did not have to work from seven to six every day in a factory. She felt superior and ladylike when she made mean remarks about the women who still had to. Joe's mother liked talk of any kind, though. Too much quiet made her uneasy. Joe's father didn't talk much except to make slow requests for more food. He had accepted the button factory for so many years that he carried its dull weight about with him as a hunchback carries his hump, hardly aware of the cause of his persistent heaviness and awkwardness. When he had eaten his bread pudding, Joe's father wearily lighted his corncob pipe and pushed back his chair.

"I don't want no fuss from you about taking Hazel to that dance, Joe," he said. Then he retreated to the cluttered dining room. "Jesus God, what a mess!" he said, and went on into the parlor with his paper.

Joe understood that his mother had made his father speak to him. He hadn't expected any help from his father anyhow. His father never took any notice of him except Sunday

afternoons when they pitched quoits with the Dubrowsky boys in the alley back of the house. But his mother always used her husband's authority when she realized that she could not control her stepson with her peevishness and complaining. His mother got up from the table now and started carrying the dishes to the sink.

"You heard whatyafather said, Joe. You help your sista-witha dishes while I put in that hem. Soonzyou get finished, go right upstairs and get throughntha bathroom sozIcan help Hazel dress without you undafoot every minute. Mind now!"

Joe hated helping with the dishes. And especially tonight. He hated every damp and dripping plate he had to pick up. And he was being driven to jittery rage because Hazel was humming in her dreary monotone.

"Do you *have* to make that noise?"

"Joey's mad and I'm glad and I know how to please him . . ."

"Shut up!"

"I won't shut up and don't you try to boss me around neither or I'll tell Mamma!"

Her voice rose till Joe was afraid it would be heard over the whirr of the machine in the next room.

"Geez Almighty, why do you have to be such a baby!"

He reached quickly for the milk pitcher.

"Here—it's not done yet."

"Well, get a wiggle on!"

He grabbed it out of her hands. It was slippery and it fell to the floor and broke into five neat blue pieces.

"Joe, what *are* you doing?"

"He broke the pitcher, Mamma."

His mother came to the door.

"Merciful heavens! I can't leave you children alone for a—my *good* pitcher!" Her raveled nerves gave way and she began to sob weakly. "Joe Geddes, you get right upstairs and get dressed this minute!"

She started for him with her hand raised and he ducked and raced past her, up the stairs, into his room. He slammed the door.

"Geez Almighty, I'm going nuts!" he said loudly to relieve his feelings. The bell of the Catholic church began to ring and the clock in the parlor downstairs struck seven times. Joe crossed to the window. Seven o'clock and Cozy and Pug would be leaving. He could still make it, out the window, onto the kitchen roof. It was a good drop to the ground on the side away from the kitchen windows, but he could do it okay. The thought of escape was so entrancing, so action-provoking that he could no more resist it than a man could stop struggling toward the air from a closed-up place. He thought he would die if he did not get out of that house this minute.

He let himself cautiously out on the roof, removing his shoes before walking across the tin. He knew the best place to drop and his fall made no more noise than he'd expected. He beat it up the alley in his stocking feet, hastily put on his shoes, and ran through the Dubrowsky's yard to the Path.

In the early evening light, he could just make out the battered old jalopy that must be Pug's. Its motor was coughing and spitting and Joe was filled with sudden terror lest it jerk into motion before he reached it. He was afraid to call out, though nobody could possibly have heard him over all that racket. What he did was to run harder than ever till he got a foot on the wobbly running board, just as the jalopy lurched into jerky progress.

"Here I am!"

Cozy turned round and hauled him in by the shoulders.

"We was afraid you wouldn't make it, Joey," Cozy said. "We waited long's we could. Squeeze over, Pug. Make room for Joey."

Pug urged his bulk into the corner and Joe collapsed, breathing hard and sweating, up against Cozy. They were down the hill now and past the car track. The cool evening

air was freshness and freedom in Joe's hair and he felt excited and alive.

"Love, oh love, oh care-liss, care-liss love," he sang as loud as he could over the roar and rattle of the motor. He had made it. He was free for the whole night. He had escaped. He was going to hear the band. The hell with tomorrow. . . .

## *Chapter II*

THEY BOUNCED NOISILY INTO IOWA CITY about nine that night. They found the streets where the fraternity houses were all right. You couldn't miss them because they were all lit up and most of them were having dances. Some of them had big lighted letters on the roof, but the K's and A's were the only letters Joe could read. Girls and fellows were piling out of cars in front of those houses. Or strolling up and down those streets, arm in arm. Or sitting on the railings of the big porches, laughing and talking and smoking—singing every once in a while. Bands were already playing in some of those houses.

"They playing the Kappa Sig house," Pug said, turning a corner. "But I don't know exactly where."

"You think we can read those signs they got?" Cozy said.

"Don't matter. I'll find him."

Pug did, too. Suddenly, driving down one of those wide streets, Pug said, "Thass him!" They followed the sound of the cornet to the house.

"Can we go right in even if they don't know us?" Joe asked. He could understand how Pug could recognize that cornet, but he had a vague fear of college fraternities. They were very exclusive. He'd heard fellows at school talk about them.

"No, Joey. But Pug knows a fellow works in this house. He'll let us in the kitchen."

They parked down the street a way and walked back to the Kappa Sig house. They went around back, moving quietly behind the hedge at the edge of the lawn. They ducked through a sparse place in the hedge and tiptoed up to the kitchen steps. Inside, a young Negro with a lanky

body and an elliptical head was mixing punch in a big bowl. He had on a white jacket like a hospital coat. A tall blond boy came into the kitchen and emptied his flask into the pink liquid in the punch bowl.

"You wanna watch that stuff, Mistah Rogah," the Negro boy said, laughing.

"I wanna watch out you don't sample it all away! Take it inside now, Buster. The band's going to start for real pretty soon."

Joe and Cozy and Pug sat on the porch steps and waited for Buster to come back. It was pleasant out there on the back porch, darkly green and fresh. The crickets were loudly insistent all around them and the stars were very bright and numerous above them. Joe sat, relaxed in an effortless peace and quiet in the midst of activity, comfortably remote. Now and then a girl laughed shrilly from one of the other houses. Or the music of another house's band droned distantly in the dark. Or young voices called to each other out on the street.

Then their band began, slowly, easily, as they would, of course, begin. Uncertain a little, feeling their way. But playing together good, the rhythm rocking gently like a well-propelled swing. Joe nudged Cozy.

"What is it?"

"Thing called *Fidgety Feet*."

"Oh."

Joe leaned back against the railing, waiting for the cornet to get free on a break. He did, on a break that ended with two sly little notes at the end, impudent and right. Joe and Cozy and Pug laughed. When the band went into *Riverboat Shuffle*, Buster came back, stepped to the kitchen door and saw them.

"Well, I'm damned," he said. "Pug Johnson. Where you all come from?"

"We come to hear the white boys' band," Pug said. "Met them in Chicago. They told us they'd be here tonight. Jig told us. So we come."

The cornet took a solo and they all stopped to listen.

"Yeah, *man*," said Pug. Then he introduced them to each other.

"You still working the boats?" Buster said when Jig had subsided to lead the ensemble with a steady brass cornet rein.

"Sure. Cozy and me is on the same boat together now."

"Still playing piano?"

"Naw. Switched to drums."

"He's okay, too," Cozy said.

Joe didn't mind being left out now. There was the music. He listened in his musician's way and he knew how good it was.

"You guys wanna drink?"

"Where you gonna get it?"

"Mistah Rogah don't mind if I take some of his likker. He got lots."

Buster brought them gin in white cups. Joe had never tasted gin before and he was a little afraid of trying it here in front of these seasoned drinkers. But Buster gave him his cup, just like the others, like an equal, and none of them looked to see whether he drank or whether he didn't. He put his cup quickly to his lips. The gin felt cool in his mouth, but he jumped when it hit his throat. He hardly coughed at all, though. He just drank more cautiously, sipping his gin like a cordial. In a little while, all his nerve ends seemed to glow like a thousand separate candles.

The music ended and the talk and laughter inside swelled up. A husky, black-haired man with a swarthy face came into the kitchen, and a slight, blond guy with a cigarette drooping from one corner of his small mouth. The little guy held a lighted match in cupped hands for the husky man's smoke.

"Thass Jig," cried Pug. "Tell him we're here, Buster."

But the two new guys were already at the kitchen door.

"Look who's here!" said the slight one. "Hey, Biff, it's Cozy and Pug!"

Jig and Biff sat down on the kitchen steps, too, and they



all started talking in that brisk, apocryphal way that Joe had begun to recognize as musicians' talk. He only caught names and phrases here and there that he understood, but he didn't feel lost the way he usually did when older people talked and he didn't understand. He felt at home. He recognized a lot of the names they used from the labels on Mame's records. Louie. Baby Dodds. Bix. Bessie. Papa Joe. It seemed impossible that the printed names should come to life in the mouths of these men and do everyday things like playing jobs, eating, drinking, getting married, getting fired—all of which bits of information wandered in and out of this lively conversation on the kitchen steps.

"I'd walk a hundred miles with my horn to play for Bessie," this Jig was saying, sitting right on the steps above Joe and talking about Bessie Smith. "Hey, Cozy, sit in?"

"You crazy, boy?"

"Not that I know about."

"I ain't got no horn."

"You can borrow Biff's."

Joe knew why Cozy wouldn't sit in. Niggers weren't supposed to play with white people. He liked Jig strongly because he didn't seem to be thinking about it, but he didn't want Cozy to be embarrassed.

"Let me sit in!" he said, too loud.

They all turned to look down at him.

"You wouldn't want to bother the boys when they're working, kid," Jig said, not unkindly.

"I'm not a kid. I'm a saxophone player."

Cozy laughed contentedly to himself.

"He telling you right, Jig. He plays sax. I taught him myself some."

"No kidding?" Jig looked at Joe with a new interest.

"Hey, you guys!" A head was thrust through the door to the kitchen as if on a stick.

"Okay, Danny, we're coming," the swarthy Biff answered, and he and Jig got up to go back to the dance.

"Send him in after a while, why don't you, Cozy?"

"Sure thing."

They went on inside and presently the music began again. They were warmed up now and the tone was richer, fuller, the improvisations more daring. The cornet rode high and sweet, with flashes of silver tone dropping gently, plaintively, or brilliantly sharp from the horn.

Joe wasn't hearing them very clearly. He was wishing he'd kept his mouth shut. He was thinking he'd have to go in there and play—and he was scared. If they'd give him a sax out here and he and Cozy and Pug could play, that would be swell. But in there—with all those people!

He took another sip of the gin. No, that wouldn't do. Cozy said you couldn't drink too much when you were playing because it made your lips feel stiff. He tried to relax and enjoy himself. He made himself listen to the music. They were playing *Georgia*. "Just a little song keeps Georgia on my mind." A girl's voice began to sing the words. It was a husky voice. It was a voice that approached the notes lovingly, clung to them as it sang them, and left them with a little wistful, regretful kindness.

"Who that singin'?" asked Cozy, listening.

"Dunno. She's good, though," Pug said. He was shaking his big head gently from side to side, as if someone were telling him a sorrowful, pitiful tale.

"Some white girl," Buster said. "Some friend of the drummer's."

"Don't sound like no white girl."

Joe listened to the white girl's voice and he couldn't tell, listening to her voice, whether he was scared or not. *Georgia* was making him want to play. But when *Georgia* was over, and Jig came rushing out to the kitchen again, Joe was scared.

"It's dull in there," Jig said. "They'd rather hear Ted Lewis. Want to come in for a gag, kid?"

When he walked into that fraternity living room, cleared

of furniture now for the dancing, Joe thought he had never been so scared in his life. He'd rather have fought both Dubrowsky boys at once than face that roomful of college boys and girls, all watching him, all wanting something exciting to happen. The five musicians sat in one corner with their instruments in their laps. The drummer sat up high behind a bass drum that had a camel and three pyramids painted on it. Inside the bass drum there was an amber light that kept flashing off and on. The amber light seemed to Joe to be screaming at him. The drummer played a loud press roll, and Jig raised his hand for attention.

"We got a local kid here," Jig said, "who's going to sit in with us. Where you come from, kid?"

"Muscatine," Joe whispered. But he was beginning to get a little sore. He didn't know where this guy got off, calling him "kid." He wasn't so old himself.

"You play like Rudy Wiedoft?"

The boys in the band laughed. Joe knew why. He'd heard Wiedoft on records and he knew corn when he heard it.

"No," he said. "I play like Cozy Wilson."

"My mistake, Gate. Give us your sax, Biff. What'll it be?"

Just then the drummer leaned over his camel and his three pyramids to say something to a girl standing below him. She was a tiny girl and the drummer had to lean over quite a lot. One of his sticks touched Joe, standing in front of him, and Joe turned around. The girl had a very broad face, and soft, black hair brushed away from a wide forehead. Her mouth was awfully big as she smiled, listening to the drummer, and her eyes were clear and steady and gray. She shook her head at the drummer and put a finger to her lips.

"What'll it be, kid?" Jig said again.

Joe turned away from the drummer and his girl. He fitted the strap of the sax around his neck and touched his fingers lightly to the holes of Biff's instrument.

"I know *Sweet Sue* and *Dipper Mouth*," he said.

"What key?"

"Huh? Oh—any key."

There was something about the look on Joe's face, now he had the horn in his hands—a desperate look and yet a look as if his face were lit up from within. Not lit up with an electric bulb, but with a kind of brilliance of its own. Maybe it was just the amber light from the drum. But any artist would have recognized that look, and Jig Carson was an artist.

"Okay, kid," he said. "Let's have it. Make it *Dipper Mouth*."

The drummer gave the beat on the rims and they started. Joe felt all right, once they were playing. He played straight at first, just following along with the harmony. Then, when Jig gave him the nod, he set in bravely by himself for a solo. After the first bar, he wasn't scared any more. Even the strange reed felt sure and almost pliable in his mouth. His fingers did exactly what his mind told them to do.

He closed his eyes while he played as he had seen Cozy do. It helped him concentrate. When he had finished one chorus, it felt so good he began another. He was conscious of the boys behind him adapting themselves to his playing. They hadn't expected him to take that second chorus, but, when he did, they slipped easily into a different rhythm background for him. They were swell. Playing with his eyes closed, he didn't see Jig's face change from amusement to mild wonder—to satisfaction—to delight. But, as Joe neared the end of his second chorus and opened his eyes again, he saw that Jig was going to forget to signal in the trombone player—because he was absorbed in listening to the kid saxophone player. And the kid saxophone player was good.

The trombone came in by himself and they went on. When they got towards the end where the drummer, in the tradition of the tune, shouts raucously, "Play that thing!" Joe felt weak. His spinal column, right at the base, felt as if it had been dipped in fire. In the middle of his stomach, an excited peace stirred and came to life. Then it was all over.

The college kids clapped and cheered and Joe realized they had liked him. Jig said, "Good boy!" which pleased him more, though. The college kids started to crowd around and jabber. But the boys in the band formed a kind of phalanx and eased Joe out toward the kitchen. They didn't jabber. They said things like "Okay, kid" and "Got a tone sort of like Cozy" and "Ever been to Chicago?" Things that made him feel at home and one of them. The girl with the black hair, the one the drummer had leaned over to talk to, came along. She said, "You were all *right*."

Jig led Joe out on the back porch where Pug and Cozy waited. Jig put his arm around Joe's shoulders and he said it right in front of all of them.

"Where you been keeping this Little Gate, Cozy?" Jig said.

"Little Gate," Pug said and laughed in his throat. "Thass good! Little Gate!"

"You done great, Joey," Cozy said, grinning with quiet pleasure.

Then Jig sat down on the steps with them, his arm still around Joe, and, for the first time in his life, Joe felt that he belonged. He had only done the thing he did the simplest, most naturally, and best. And it was enough to make him one of them. He didn't have to say or do anything else about it. He belonged. He heard Jig talking to him, earnestly, professionally.

"You ought to start working with a band, kid," Jig said. "You got a lot to learn. Any bands in Muscatine?"

Joe answered as sensibly as he could. He didn't know quite what he was saying because his elation was so high and sure. He had been called "Little Gate," top diminutive for a hot musician, by this Chicago horn player. And not in any silly, schoolboy way, either, but calmly, easily, naturally, as if he meant it.

They didn't ask him to play again. They didn't even come back to say good-bye when the dance was over and the street echoed to spasmodic snatches of *Goodnight, Ladies*, in un-

certain harmony. They drove off in a bunch somewhere, Buster said. To Davenport where the drummer lived. Joe and Cozy and Pug got into their jalopy and started for Muscatine. Joe was sleepy now. It was nearly two o'clock and he kept dozing off as they bounced past the level Iowa fields.

He kept dreaming snatches of dreams. Sometimes they were fine, exciting dreams. He was playing a solid gold horn in a huge room made entirely of mirrors. Jig's reflection appeared a hundred times and always smiling in the mirrors. Sometimes they were bad dreams. His mother threatened him with a big stick wound in blue thread. When she started to scold, she put the stick to her mouth and no words came out, but the high, shrill and off-key sound of a badly-played clarinet.

He couldn't explain to Cozy and Pug that he probably wouldn't be able to get into his own house, so he jumped out quickly when they stopped in front of the shack. He wanted to say something to Cozy to express how he felt about the most wonderful evening he had ever spent in his whole life.

He said, "G'night, Cozy. Pug. And geez! Thanks!"

Then he walked quietly up the road towards his house. There were no lights on, so they hadn't waited up. They sure wouldn't have left any doors open for him, either. And he couldn't make it back in the window without help. The hell with it.

He moved slowly and noiselessly up on the front porch. He turned back one of the rockers that his mother or Hazel leaned so carefully forward against the wall each night, with the rockers sticking up, scythelike, into the air. He curled up under the rocker and then jiggled it quietly back into place. He was chilly under this inadequate wooden covering, but not so chilly he couldn't sleep. He knew he had done well what he wanted to do. It was a knowledge he could sleep with.

## *Chapter III*

WHEN HAZEL CAME OUT TO TURN BACK the porch rockers first thing in the morning, she screamed, "Here's Joey!" and ran to her mother in the kitchen. Then his father came out in his undershirt.

"Go downstairs, Joe," his father said.

"Listen, I guess I shouldn't have done it, but listen to what happened. Listen to what—"

"Go downstairs, Joe."

While he was standing there in the cellar, bending over the tool chest with his pants down, he went on in his mind, trying to tell about it, thinking what he'd say if they'd only listen, talking himself out of feeling his beating too much.

"Listen, those big guys from Chicago said I was good. Have you ever even been to Chicago? No. So you pretend Chicago isn't important because you've never been there. But last night I played for guys that live right there and they said I was good. Listen, I could go right up there to Chicago myself some day and play the same way. Good."

He gripped the edge of the tool chest hard. His father was a big man and the whack of his razor strap hurt.

"Aw, what's it to you? You're my father and you stand there lambasting my backside with a razor strap because my stepmother told you to. You don't even know what for. You just know Hazel was bawling and mother screaming her head off last night and it was all my fault. If I'd stayed home everything would have been sweet and lovely and no trouble. But what about me? I wouldn't have played for those guys from Chicago and Jig wouldn't have called me Little Gate. So I win."

The pain was beginning to burn steadily, not only in the usual place, but along his arms and back.

"All right. Knock me around. Wallop me on the back, too, you're so mad. I don't care. I didn't have to take Hazel to that dance and I did play sax for those guys. Just because you don't know anything about it doesn't mean you're right. Cozy and Pug know more about it right now than you'll ever know—any of you. Mame, too. And I can't even go to see them because they're niggers. You care more about them being niggers than you do about how they play. The hell with all of you. You can beat me up even more than you're doing, but you can't make me sorry I went and played the sax for those guys last night."

His mother came to the cellar door.

"Hurry up, Bill," she said. "You'll be late for work."

"Pull up your pants," said his father. "Don't expose yourself indecently in front of your mother."

Upstairs in the kitchen, his mother bustled around in a good rage, a perfectly justified one, in her opinion, and so she was enjoying herself. She kept jumping up to get more coffee that nobody wanted. She'd take a bite of fried potato or fried egg and then jump up and get some coffee for somebody.

"You feel better now, honey?" she asked Hazel every five minutes.

Hazel's eyes were red and swollen and she kept them lowered while she ate. Every once in a while she'd take a quick look, though, to see how Joe was taking his punishment. Joe was sitting carefully on the edge of his chair.

"I hate Joey," she said in a sharp, strident voice. "I hate him even if he is my brother."

"I'm not your brother," Joe said. "Not altogether."

"Shut up, you two," said their father.

That's all he said till he picked up his dinner pail and was ready to leave for the factory. At the kitchen door, he turned



and said directly to Joe, "There's to be no more carryings-on like last night."

"Your father's gonsee Jack Wheelock downt tha factory aboutajob for you," his mother said. "Keep yowta mischief."

"I'll tell him, Maggie," his father said, with tired dignity. "You'll work at the tomato factory this summer, Joe, and you won't hang around those niggers any more. That's what I say and that's what I mean, Joe."

When the door had closed on his father, his mother kept at it.

"We're not gonhavny bumsn this fam'ly," she said, tap-tap-tapping with her fingers on the breakfast table. "Common m'sicians, playnall night when decent folkrin bed. Drinkncarousnheaven knows what all. Niggerzenboozen-smokin'. Ruin their health and break their mothers' hearts. I won't have it, Joe Geddes. You heard whatya fathasaid."

She got up from her chair and gathered up the plates, scraping them as she stacked them.

"Well, better get thouse cleaned up f'Sunday. Joe, you gotatha store now. Here's a list. And rememba whatya fathasaid."

Joe went to the store. He moved stiffly because his whole back hurt from his beating. But he went to the store, scrubbed both porches, and cleaned four pairs of shoes. Standing on the front porch about ten-thirty with a wet broom in his hand, he looked down towards the shack and wondered what Mame and Cozy and Pug were doing. Sleeping, probably. And he couldn't even go down and say good-bye to Cozy. There was justice for you. Hazel could sit in there and practice *The Robin's First Lullaby* and that was supposed to be music and he was supposed to listen to it, no matter how many wrong notes she played or what kind of rhythm. But Mame could sit down there and play *Runnin' Wild* the way she played it and that wasn't supposed to be music and he wasn't allowed to listen to it.

These were the times when, out of an adolescent self-pity,

Joe remembered his own mother. Not so much how she looked. She had been dead for more than ten years, and how she looked had become a knowledge of hair and eyes like his own—not dark, not light, kind of a neutral brown. Eyes that always seemed to be looking somewhere beyond you. You looked into them and then you wanted to look back of you to see what it was the eyes were looking at. He could see that much in the album downstairs any time he wanted to look. He could see her long face and high forehead like his own. How he remembered her, though, was the sound of a low voice laughing. Or singing. The feel of her fingers guiding his own on the piano keys. A vague sense of warm sweetness when her arms were around him.

When she died and Maggie and Hazel came, the gentle chaos of the house was changed to a bright, hard activity. Maggie was a strong woman who had worked in the button factory, like Bill Geddes. A widow, supporting a daughter of her own. Joe's father felt more at home with Maggie than he ever had with Joe's mother. Maggie was the kind of woman he needed. She could do the wash in half a day and have time left over for canning. But she was not soft and pretty like Joe's own mother. Or at least like Joe's own mother as he remembered her.

He never played the piano after she died. Just stopped. He started on the saxophone at school finally, because Mr. Dilworth, the teacher who led the school orchestra, needed another saxophone and recognized in Joe a boy who learned music quickly. Mr. Dilworth was right. Joe played most instruments with a sure instinct, once the general principle of how to produce higher or lower sounds had been explained to him. But he liked the saxophone best. It had a sad kind of vibrating sound and he discovered that it was a better feeling, playing something you held right in your mouth, than playing something that kept the music remote by a length of arm and only got to you through the tips of your fingers. Like a piano, for instance.

His musical talent he dismissed in the casual way people who really have it dismiss it. He figured it came to him from his mother and he had a right to it. Her people had all been musical. A picture in the album in the parlor showed his mother at the piano, with her hair down her back, wearing a white dress with enormous leg-o'-mutton sleeves, and looking out of the picture with that beyond look. *Her* mother was standing beside her in the picture, holding a mandolin by the neck. Her brother had a violin. And her father, a big man in a long black coat and a high collar, held a cornet against one hip. Her father looked defiantly out of the picture with his cornet on his hip, and it may have been that some of Joe's own defiance came from this unknown grandfather of his. Already Joe defied the ordered arrangement of tones that passes with the unimaginative for music. He also defied the ordered arrangement of events that passes with the unimaginative for living.

Today, however, he wasn't feeling so very defiant. He was feeling confused and miserable and sore all over. At three o'clock, when he was through working for his mother, he walked out and went downtown. Some of the farmers were in already. They came out of Linder's Department Store or the hardware or feed stores with bundles in their arms, and they put the bundles in cars or wagons at the curb. Their wives walked up and down, looking in all the windows. Their children ran back and forth between street and sidewalk, when they could get free of their mothers' restraining hands. Everybody was laughing and talking and happy and important, and not one of them knew or cared that there walked among them a seventeen-year-old boy who felt alien because all he wanted to do was to play the saxophone.

Joe walked through the crowds with his head down and his feet scuffing and dragging. There was only one place in town where a seventeen-year-old boy could go when he felt alien because all he wanted to do was to play the saxophone.

Only one place besides Mame's. He went past Linder's and the Opera House, crossed the street and walked almost to the Hotel. He turned into Masterman's Music Store.

Once inside, he stood for a minute and looked out through the plate glass window to the street. In the window, two cornets, a banjo, two violins, and an accordion stood with their backs to him. Just below his chin at the back of the window a wire was stretched on which sheet music hung like wash on a line. He liked standing there and looking out. There was a library hush over Masterman's and it was where he wanted to be. He felt closer to the two cornets, the banjo, the fiddles, and the accordion with their backs to him than he did to all the people moving in the street beyond.

At the piano behind him he could hear Rose Dubrowsky reading through the notes of a tune called *Can't Stop Babying You*. She had looked up when he came in and called out "Hello, Joe," in that friendly way she had and he had answered "H'lo" without turning away from the window. Rose was in Joe's class at school and lived next door to him and he could speak to her any time. Saturdays she worked for Mr. Masterman. She played whatever people asked her to play. Saturday nights, when the store had a good many customers, she was pretty busy. A lot of people came in to ask her to play *Moonlight and Roses* and stuff like that. They'd play band records on the phonograph in the back of the store and buy strings for banjos and fiddles and then they'd ask Rose to play them the latest sheet music. Some of the fellows just came in to talk to Rose. Some of the men just came in to look at her. Right now Joe was getting annoyed because Rose kept leaving out the seventh on the second bar of the chorus of *Can't Stop Babying You*.

He turned and walked to the counter where the instruments were sold.

Tilted back in a chair against the counter, Mr. Masterman sat reading the Des Moines paper. He was a plump little cupid of a man in gray trousers and a black alpaca jacket.

"Hello, Joe," he said, looking over the top of the paper through his bifocals. "Want something?"

"I'm thinking of buying a saxophone, Mr. Masterman," Joe said. He could *say* it, couldn't he?

Mr. Masterman put the paper down and went behind the counter.

"Got a Conn here. Conn's the best," he said, taking it down from the shelf behind him. "Only one I got in stock. Don't many people play the saxophone."

Joe took it, gleaming like a giant's gold pipe, out of its case. He assembled it, adjusted the reed, and put it to his mouth. He gave it a few tentative bars of *Runnin' Wild*.

"It's okay, Mr. Masterman," he said, exactly as if he were going to buy it.

He tried a little of the piece Rose was playing, that *Can't Stop Babying You*, going heavy on the seventh in the second bar. She wouldn't get the idea anyhow. Then he tried a few consciously comic bars of *The Robin's First Lullaby*, giving it wrong notes, and bleats, and corn effects, a very satisfying imitation of Hazel's playing, after which he felt better. He started on *Sweet Sue*. When he had finished and the little store no longer vibrated with rhythm, *Sweet Sue* had been so thoroughly explored, so completely remolded and patterned under his inquiring fingers, that it had become a series of variations on a theme no longer remembered, except in the fundamental skeleton of its harmony.

A more tutored, more self-conscious musician would long ago have rushed for pen and manuscript to set it down in inky permanence. Not Joe Geddes. He put down the horn and laughed.

"You sure play swell, Joey," Rose Dubrowsky said. She said it in a slow and calculating voice that measured Joe rather than the music. But she had been impressed with that torrent of sound, too. She didn't know any boys who did anything, much less play that fast and that long, with such sureness and authority. Rose raised her hands and applauded.

There was firm and vigorous applause from the front of the store, too. It was applause from a boy and girl standing just inside the door. They must have come in while Joe was playing with his eyes closed because he hadn't noticed them. The boy was Frank Linder. Joe knew him because Frank was one of the boys everybody knew at school. Frank's father owned the big department store on Main Street. Joe didn't know the girl.

"Say," Frank said, coming towards him with quick, jerky steps. "I didn't know you could play like that. You play in the orchestra at school, don't you? You never play like that at school."

He was a tall, thin boy with a face that looked as if it had been worried out of clay. He had black hair, straight and fine, that jagged over his forehead continually. He kept pushing it back with a gesture that was not impatient but rather an excuse for expending his energy. He gave the impression that, come a good puff of wind, he would brush back his hair and be carried away with it. He talked faster than a good stomp.

"Nobody asks me to play like that at school," Joe said. He didn't want Frank Linder making a fuss over him just because he happened to overhear him playing jazz.

"Here I thought you were just another saxophone player from school, and here it turns out you play like that. Hey, Irene!" he called over his shoulder. "Come on over here."

The girl came, walking slowly, looking amused.

"You know who this is?" Frank went on. "This is one of the fellows plays in the orchestra at school. Only he doesn't play like that at school."

"However he plays," Irene said, "he's better than you. I bet you couldn't even *make* the orchestra at school."

It didn't sound mean the way she said it, though it was a mean thing to say. It just sounded amused the way she said it. She was right, too. Old Dill said Frank was too nervous to play drums in the school orchestra. Joe smiled. Frank

said, "Okay, Chicago. *Be* high and mighty. But I want you to meet . . ." He stopped. He didn't even remember Joe's name.

"Joe Geddes."

"Thanks, Joe. This is Joe Geddes, Irene. Joe, this is my high and mighty cousin from Chicago, Irene Jaynes. How we happened to stop by just now, we're looking for some new music. But what we're really looking for is a saxophone player. The fellow been playing with us got the mumps and we got a real job tonight and no saxophone."

Joe found out later that Frank always talked like that. He'd introduce subjects that were complete strangers to you and all you could do was wait, on the general theory that if you waited long enough, it would all straighten itself out. While waiting, Joe remembered his manners enough to say "Pleased to meet you" to Irene Jaynes and she said "Hello" to him. Her voice was not quite a girl's voice, not like any girl he knew. There was a husky vibrancy about it that didn't seem quite—well, quite decent for a girl's voice. Joe thought he'd heard a voice like that recently. He remembered voices he heard that he liked. He looked again at this girl. She was tiny and her face was broad under the close hat she was wearing. Her mouth was awfully big and her eyes were clear and steady and gray. Then Joe recognized her. She was the girl who had stood by the drummer last night in Iowa City. She was the one who had sung, in that same husky voice, "Just a little song keeps Georgia on my mind."

"It's the Odd Fellows we're going to play for tonight," Frank was saying, "and they're going to give us ten dollars for the three of us. Only because Jimmy's got the mumps, there are only two of us and we have no sax. You ever play with a band before, Joe?"

"I played with some guys from Chicago last night. Fellow named Jig from Chicago called me Little Gate."

He hadn't meant to say that to strangers, but when a thing has been choked up inside you all day . . .

"Not Jig Carson?"

"Yeah, that's the one." Let it be Jig Carson. Joe didn't care. He was from Chicago and he was good.

"You're making that up."

"I am not."

"You're crazy. Jig Carson's in Chicago. He never played around here."

"He did last night."

"Joe's right, Frank," Irene Jaynes said. "Jig brought some boys down to Iowa City last night."

"How do you know?"

"I heard him. At the Kappa Sig house."

"Hey, I thought you only got down here this morning!"

"Well, you see . . ."

"You little son-of-a-gun! You just *said* that, and all the time . . ."

"What happened was this boy who plays drums with Jig sometimes is a friend of mine and he drove me down last night and . . ."

"For two cents, I'd—"

"If you tell on me—"

"Where'd you sleep?"

"We didn't. We drove back to this drummer's house, Danny Acosta's, in Davenport and jammed a while and the boys drove me over this morning to Muscatine."

"You stingy little son-of-a-gun!"

"It came up all of a sudden, Frank. I couldn't have let you know. Anyhow, you know your mother wouldn't have liked it. She thinks our half of the family is crazy."

"You could at least have told me about Joe here when you heard me yelling at lunch about Jimmy being sick."

"In the first place, I didn't know who Joe here was, and in the second place I didn't want to say anything in front of Aunt Mildred, and in the third place you were yelling so much I didn't have a chance!"

She laughed then and her laugh was deep and easy. A little



like Mame's laugh. If Mame had been little. And white. She laughed with her eyes and her mouth and her shoulders and Joe thought it made a very pleasant noise. Then she turned and put a hand on his arm.

"Jig talked about you after," she said. "After the dance, I mean. He said you had the makings of a great sax man. He said your tone was terrible, but that could be improved."

"Did he honest?"

"Yes, he did, Joe. And he knows. I got to know him in Chicago and he knows. He doesn't know much about anything else, but he knows about music."

"He's nice, isn't he? All of them are nice, aren't they?"

Irene smiled. There was a restful slowness about the way she smiled. About the way she talked, too.

"Yes," she said. "They're nice."

"Quit talking, you two," said Frank. "We ought to be showing Joe what we're going to play tonight and how we take things if he's going to play with us. Look, Rose, would you mind if Irene just used the piano a minute." The way Frank moved Rose off the piano stool it wouldn't have made much difference if she minded or if she didn't. "Irene doesn't play with us, Joe, but she knows most of the stuff. She's good for a girl. I'll just use the seat of this chair, if you don't mind, Mr. Masterman."

Rose and Mr. Masterman were shunted out of the range of Frank's exuberance, as he whipped two drumsticks out of his pocket and began setting up in a businesslike way.

"Now take *Dinah* first," he said, squatting by the chair with the drumsticks poised in place. "We take it in E Flat, start right in with the chorus straight . . ."

"Wait a minute," Joe said. "Not so fast. In the first place, this isn't my sax. I was just trying it out. And I'm not sure I can make it tonight."

"Why not? Don't you want to?"

"Well, sure, but . . ."

He certainly wasn't going to tell Frank Linder that he

might not be allowed to go, that his mother might not allow him. That was baby stuff.

"We can get Jimmy's sax. You ever had the mumps? That's what Jimmy's got, but he hasn't played his sax since he got them so I guess it won't matter. Okay? *Dinah* in E Flat. Ready, Irene?"

Frank rapped twice on the seat of the chair.

"Listen," Joe said desperately. "I caught he— I caught the dickens at home for going up to Iowa City last night. My folks aren't going to—"

"Let's call up and ask."

"We haven't got a phone."

"Well, then, let's go on out to your house and ask. You just got to do it, Joe. Come on!"

Firmer characters than Joe Geddes were not able to stand out against Frank Linder's energy. Joe found himself handing the sax back to Mr. Masterman and hurrying along after Frank and Irene. She shrugged her shoulders.

"He's always like that," she said. "Every time I visit them I see that he's always like that. The only time it does any good is when he's playing drums."

They took the streetcar and rode to the end of the line. It gave Frank just about enough time to explain the entire repertoire of the Muscatine Friars Rhythm Band to Joe. Frank sang the tempos, whistled a good many of the licks they had worked out, and demonstrated the drum parts on the straw sideseats of the trolley. Irene didn't seem to mind, but Joe was embarrassed. People turned to look at them; some giggled and nudged each other; others stared. One of the Dubrowsky boys, coming home early from the button factory, caught Joe's eye and made a wide circle with his forefinger, just to one side of his forehead, then pointed to Frank. If Frank noticed any of the attention he was getting, it didn't bother him. Joe felt that his mother probably wouldn't bother Frank any either. But he wasn't prepared for their reception the way it happened.

His mother and Hazel were at the kitchen window when they came towards his house. They were working at the sink and, when they saw Joe, they put their heads together and talked. Hazel had wire curlers in her hair and Joe saw his mother give her a little push and she disappeared. His mother opened the kitchen door.

"This is Frank Linder and Irene Jaynes, Mother," he said. "They—"

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Linder and Miss Jaynes," his mother said. "Joe, you should have brought your young friends in the front way. You'll have to excuse him, Mr. Linder, Miss Jaynes. He's so careless. Come in the parlor, will you?"

Joe looked at his mother, leading them into the darkened parlor. He couldn't imagine what made her so pleasant. She talked as if she were reading out of a book, the way she talked to the minister on Sundays. So polite.

"I hope your mother and father are keeping well, Mr. Linder," she said, pulling out chairs and raising the blinds.

"They're fine, Mrs. Geddes," Frank said. "We—"

"And this is the visitor from Chicago. A cousin, I believe the paper said?"

"Yes. My mother and Frank's were sisters."

"Well, it's nice having you with us. Can I fix you a cup of tea?"

"We can't stay, Mrs. Geddes, thank you," Frank said. "But Joe here wasn't sure you'd let him go tonight on account of last night. But tonight wouldn't be like that at all, I promise you, and we're in a bad spot, so we wanted to ask you—"

"Don't mind Frank, Mrs. Geddes," Irene put in. "He's a nice boy, but he talks so fast he gets mixed up. I don't blame you for being confused. What Frank wants to ask you is if Joe can play a dance tonight with Frank's band. Their saxophone player is sick and since Joe plays such good sax, they'd like him to fill in."

She stopped and smiled at his mother. Joe felt a kind of

assurance in the way Irene smiled. The way she talked, too.

"There's three dollars in it for him if he can make it," she added.

"Well!" Mrs. Geddes said, still in her church voice. "We knew, acourse, that Joe played the saxophone some, but we never took it very seriously. I mean, it always seemed like one of those things he did at school. Would you like to play tonight, Joey?"

She smiled at him, quick and bright, and Joe, surprised, said weakly, "You bet!"

Just then Hazel came into the room from upstairs. Her hair was frizzed all over her head now. She had on a clean dress and she walked with a little sideways step and held her chin down.

"Hello, Frank," Hazel said.

"Oh, come in, Hazel. This is my daughter, Hazel. Miss Jaynes. You know Mr. Linder, don't you, honey?"

"H'lo," Frank said.

"They're all going to a dance tonight, honey. Acourse, she's a little young, but perhaps I . . ."

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Geddes," Frank said quickly. "You see, we're not exactly going to the dance. I mean, we're just working there. We don't have tickets or anything and we'll just be sitting up there playing all night. We better go get that sax, Joe. We'll have to phone first and have them leave it out on the porch on account of the quarantine. Tell you what you do. You come to our house for supper."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of having Joe impose on your mother!"

"No imposition, Mrs. Geddes. Mother never cares how many people show up for supper. She doesn't have to fix it, so why should she worry? Come on, Joe."

"But he's not dressed!"

"Oh, that doesn't matter."

"He can't go out looking like a—looking like that. If you'd

care to wait, he could just run upstairs and change. Hurry, Joe—and put on your good suit.”

Joe was afraid not to put on his good suit, short pants and all. He wanted to get out of there in a hurry before anything happened to change her mind. He was trying to figure out what had happened anyhow. This morning she'd been so mad. Now everything was smooth as jelly. He could hear them talking down there. She was offering them a cup of tea again—in the middle of a Saturday afternoon!

In ten minutes he was back downstairs, feeling very self-conscious about his short pants. But neither Frank nor Irene seemed to notice.

“Come on, Joe. We got to hurry,” Frank said, moving towards the door.

“You must come back when you can stay longer,” said Joe's mother. “Joe, you must have your young friends come oftener, mustn't he, honey?”

“Yes, you must,” said Hazel, smiling at Frank Linder.

“Have a nice time, son,” his mother called from the porch.

Frank hurried them off towards the car tracks, talking all the way. Joe walked with Irene and they were quiet. Joe was still trying to figure it out. His mother raised Cain and had his father beat him because he went to a dance with Cozy Wilson and Pug Johnson. But she was sweet as pie to Frank Linder and Irene Jaynes. Yet they were both people who wanted him to go to a dance. All his mother knew about Cozy and Pug was that they were niggers and lived in a shack. All she knew about Frank and Irene was that Frank's father owned a store and Irene had been in the paper. That seemed to make all the difference. Just the same, he bet neither of them could play like Cozy or Pug. Neither of them worked on a river boat. Yet they were better people to his mother. And don't forget that Irene told his mother he'd get money for tonight. Last night he didn't get any money.

It boiled down to this, he supposed. You played for the right people and you got paid for it. That was what his

mother approved of. The right people and money. Well, now at least he understood what it was she wanted. And what if you didn't care about the people or the money either? Still, the money would buy that sax at Masterman's. He could go right down there Monday afternoon and slap three bucks down on the counter as a down payment. The money was all right. Maybe the people were all right, too. But, if they were, it would be, for him, because they knew about music, not because their father owned any old store—that didn't even sell music.

This was as much figuring on such a subject as Joe Geddes had ever done in his life. He was glad to bring his attention back to what Frank was saying.

" . . . and even when Jimmy comes back, we could have two saxophones, play in harmony. No reason why you shouldn't play with us right along!"

## *Chapter IV*

JOE GEDDES LIVED TWO LIVES THAT SUMMER he was seventeen in Iowa. Easily the more important to him was the life he lived after his day's work in the tomato factory was finished. The tomato factory had its uses. Joe knew that. It earned him a blanket approval at home. It gave his mother something to say about him that she found acceptable.

Days, he stood on the covered factory platform and helped sort the fruit which rolled past him, wet and red, on the corrugated iron conveyors, called rigs. The rigs carried the tomatoes in a continuous parade to the inside windows, beyond which women sat beside tubs and cut out bad spots. The best tomatoes went into the ketchup and chili sauce. Others became tomato pulp for soup. Midsummer, this was a fairly leisurely process. Later, when the tomatoes ripened faster, the farmers would bring them in faster and the work would get harder. The factory would keep open nearly twenty-four hours a day then, only closing up long enough to clean the rigs for the next day's run.

But in July there was plenty of time, nights, for band rehearsals of the Muscatine Friars Rhythm Band. Monday and Thursday nights, they rehearsed in the Linder's big house on the other side of town, away from the factory. They rehearsed in the basement—Joe and Frank and Jimmy Munsen, the boy that had had the mumps, and Dick Myers who played piano—in a corner away from the washtubs and just in front of the preserves shelves, where they did not bother the Linders. Mr. Linder just took his paper upstairs to his den and Mrs. Linder took her sewing and joined him. About ten o'clock, she always called to them to stop and made them

come upstairs for lemonade and cookies. This was the worst part of those Monday and Thursday evenings for Joe. All of the Linder house, except the basement, made him uncomfortable. It was so quiet, and its furnishings seemed to him so elegant. Deep-piled rugs and plush sofas and floor lamps with silk shades. As soon as he went upstairs for the lemonade and cookies, he was awkward, all hands and feet and tongue.

Downstairs, he felt at home, among the phonograph records that Frank kept in an old bookcase beside his own phonograph. And the instruments. The Linders even had a piano down in the basement, as well as one upstairs in the parlor! The Muscatine Friars worked tunes out in the Linders' basement, under Frank's direction. Frank had a natural feeling for an arrangement. He could tell when it was running too long, where the solos ought to go, and when everybody should come in together for a real loud chorus at the end. He couldn't play the drums the way he could build up a tune, though. He knew how it ought to sound, but he couldn't seem to make it sound that way. If he, Joe, could just play with some drummer like the guy on those Bessie Smith records, somebody you could feel behind you like a wall. Like that drummer Jig had with him that night in Iowa City. You could feel him shaping up behind you as you went along, easing onto the rims when you went slow and steady, whooping it up when you let it out. That's the way drums ought to be played.

Still, Joe guessed he didn't sound so hot himself. Sure, he was learning and he learned fast. Nobody taught him exactly. It would never have occurred to him to go to Old Dill, for instance, and ask about lessons. Lessons on a saxophone sounded crazy. A saxophone, his mother said, wasn't important enough to *learn*. Piano, yes. Playing the piano was an accomplishment. Maybe not so much for boys as for girls. But lessons on a saxophone! Even a violin would be better.

However they sounded, the Muscatine Friars Rhythm



Band did get jobs. Frank got them jobs. This was good because all the money Joe made with the Friars could go to pay for his sax. His tomato factory money he had to turn in at home.

Saturday nights, if they didn't have a job, Joe and Frank met at Masterman's Music Store to listen to records and look over new tunes. They preferred records to sheet music because they didn't care much for the way Rose Dubrowsky played the piano. Joe felt almost the same way about Rose's playing as he did about Hazel's. Not quite, maybe, because, while Rose didn't get what Joe called rhythm, still there was a kind of rhythm to the way she played. A kind of roll in the bass, not a bad roll, but always the same. Music that didn't give Joe the satisfying surge of rhythm he understood distressed him. He kept wanting to brush it away, like a fly buzzing around his head. Or a collar that scratched his neck just enough to be annoying.

He was waiting for Frank in Masterman's one Saturday night in July, and listening to Rose play *Yes, Sir, That's My Baby*. Anything with "Baby" in the title, you could nearly always do something with. But Rose wasn't doing anything with it. It took sixteen bars for his exasperation to get the better of his shyness. When she got into the middle part where he could hear a sax break in the two-bar rest, he nearly stopped her. But he made himself wait till the end. Then he went over and said, "Listen, why'n't you just play a solid, one-two bass?"

"One-two bass?"

Rose Dubrowsky had very large, fine eyes. At sixteen, she had learned how to use them. You turned them upwards, she had learned. You had to get a boy into a position so you looked up at him. Then you opened your eyes wide and repeated what he had just said, in a questioning tone. This way, you did not confuse the boy so that he had to pay any attention to what you were saying. This way, he just went right on talking about what interested him and you just went

on figuring him out. It was very simple. It had not been so simple to learn, but Rose was always surprised how simple it was once you had learned it.

"Yes, one-two," Joe was saying. "Don't break it up like that, just play it hard and solid. That's what gives the music its drive."

"Drive?" said Rose, with the eyes.

"Well, sock then. I don't know exactly what it is you do wrong, but your bass is never in there holding the thing up."

"Holding the thing up?"

"Listen, don't you hear very well or what?"

"Well, I may not hear very well," said Rose, quickly abandoning the eyes for the moment and going in for the more direct approach. Joe Geddes was a different kind of fellow. "But I see pretty well, Joey. And I see you every day at the tomato factory and you never even speak to me."

"Huh?"

"Now I guess it's you doesn't hear so well."

She laughed, but it was not a mean laugh because Rose remembered that this was Joe Geddes from next door who had made such a hit with that swell Frank Linder because he played the sax the way he did. Rose saw them together, back there in the record booth, talking away like old friends. Not many boys she knew were friends with boys like Frank Linder. Joe was always up at the Linder's house on Laurel Avenue and he must be making more than fifteen dollars a week already, what with the factory and those dances he played. No, Rose Dubrowsky's wasn't a mean laugh. Her laugh was low and sudden and attention-getting and it managed to sound as if it had no purpose in the world but to please you. To please Joe Geddes.

"Say," said Joe, "are you working at the factory now?"

"Sure. Just inside the window from you. I started two weeks ago, just like you."

"Well, that's sure funny."

"I see you start out mornings, but you're always in such

a hurry, I can never catch up with you. I see you on your way home, too, but you always go up the Path. It's too steep."

Joe looked at her in sudden fear. Sure he went up the Path, on the chance he might hear Mame playing. How did she know?

"I can watch you out there on the rigs all day, too."

"Well, that's sure funny," he said quickly, "that I never saw you. I guess I just never noticed. I'm very absent-minded."

"Well, there's no reason why you should notice me, I guess."

"Well, sure there is. Sure I should notice you." He was very worried that maybe Rose suspected about him and the Path. "After all," he went on nervously, "you live right next door to me and I pitch horseshoes with your brothers and your father and all like that. Gee, I'm sorry, Rose. I honestly didn't mean not to notice you and I sure will the next time. You'll see. I sure will notice you the next time."

"We might even walk home from the factory together, Joey," she said.

"Well, sure, we might. You just holler out to me the next time and we'll sure walk home from the factory together."

She had somehow managed to make it seem very secret and intimate and when a man came up suddenly to ask to have a number played, Joe backed away guiltily, knocking over several copies of sheet music as he backed. Frank Linder came up behind him, picked up the music, and steered him away. Frank had a pile of records under his arm.

"What you trying to do, break up the place?" Frank said. "Come on and hear some records. There's nobody in there now. Come on."

They went into the little cubbyhole and wound up the worn phonograph that wheezed and scratched.

"I'll watch," Joe said, and Frank nodded and started the needle on *I'm Comin' Virginia*.

One of them always watched out the glass part of the door for other customers. There was only the one machine and Mr. Masterman got sore if they kept another customer from buying because they were hogging the booth. They didn't want him coming up and banging on the door and hollering "You boys gonna stay in there all night?" the way he had done once. It was pretty embarrassing and everybody stood around and laughed when they came out. It had been particularly embarrassing that night because the customer had been Mr. Dilworth.

They listened with great satisfaction to half a dozen records and were just getting really warmed up on *Singin' the Blues* when Joe said, "Geez! Old Dill again. We better get out of here!"

"Crimeny! Hasn't he got anything better to do than come down here and spoil our fun? Let him wait."

"We can't!"

Joe had a small feeling of gratitude for Old Dill because, in the days before Joe had his own saxophone, Old Dill never locked up the school instruments, and that meant Joe could go get his saxophone any time before orchestra practice and play by himself for a while. Once or twice he had even taken the horn home last spring and Old Dill had never seemed to notice. He never said anything anyhow. Now he was coming toward the phonograph booth, a mild man with rimless eye-glasses in front of tired blue eyes. He had a tight little mouth, a straight-lined upper lip with only a slight fullness to the lower. His nickname of Old Dill suited him though he could not have been more than thirty-five.

"Okay, okay," Frank said. "We'll go."

They gathered up their records and squeezed out the little glassed-in door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Dilworth," Joe said as they passed him. He could smell liquor on Old Dill's breath.

"I don't mind waiting, boys," he said mildly. "I guess the Toreador Song from *Carmen* isn't in that much of a hurry."

He laughed jerkily and went on in and closed the door. He had two records with him and he put them down on the little table and wound up the machine a couple of times. Then the Toreador Song came out through the door, not loud enough to attract any notice, just loud enough to hear if you were right by the glass.

"Let's get out of here," Joe said.

"No, let's wait."

But Joe felt uncomfortable because Old Dill was looking out at them and smiling inquiringly.

"Let's go, Frank!"

"Okay. Wait till I pay for these. What's your hurry to-night?"

Walking Joe to his streetcar, Frank said, "You know why I wanted to wait?"

"He didn't want us nebbing around, Frank."

"That's just it. I have a queer idea about that guy."

"Sure. Because he wouldn't take you in the orchestra."

"Cripes, no. I don't care about the old school orchestra. And neither do you. But Old Dill always seemed to me to act queer—like he was bothered about something—or something."

"Aw, you're crazy."

"No, listen, Joe. You know that Toreador record."

"Sure. DA-DA-da-da-da-Da-da-da-da-da."

His streetcar had just passed, going towards the station. It would be back in a minute on the return trip, out towards the tomato factory.

"That Toreador record was just for show. In the store. You know what record Old Dill had underneath? I looked to see."

"No. What record?"

"*Sheik of Araby*."

"*Sheik of Araby*? No fooling! Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun. Old Dill . . ."

Joe thought about it for a minute.

"What's he want with the *Sheik of Araby*?"

"I don't know. Maybe he likes jazz."

"Old Dill? Fat chance. Him and his *Poet and Peasant*. Say, I bet he never heard the word jazz, let alone liking jazz."

"Well, he had the record to play anyhow. I wanted to stay and catch him playing it."

"You're a mean son-of-a-gun, aren't you?"

"No, just curious."

"You know what curiosity did to the cat."

"Only I'm no cat and—here's your trolley. See you Monday night at my house. G'night, Joe."

"G'night, Frank."

Monday night, Rose Dubrowsky did holler out at Joe and walk home with him. There wasn't much he could do about it. He was leaving the factory, as usual, and wondering if he could catch Mame playing and walk slow past her house and listen, when he heard Rose's voice.

"H'lo, Joe."

She was right beside him.

"I'm taking you up on what you said Saturday night, that we could walk home together, remember?"

"Sure. Sure, I remember."

They walked home together, not up the Path, but up the street that was farther along and not so steep. And when Joe came in the house, his mother said, "I see you walked that Dubrowsky girl home. Well, they're nice people, though any girlzpretty as that, I have my notions about."

What his mother's notions were about Rose didn't concern Joe Geddes. What did concern him was that this was a threat to a way of life he'd just worked out. He didn't want to walk home from the factory with a girl and have to make conversation. He wanted to walk home slowly up the Path and see if he could catch Mame playing. He wanted to get home, wash up, have supper, saying as little as possible to his family, and, if there was no rehearsal and no dance to play, sneak up to the attic with his horn.

The attic of the Geddes house had never been finished, but

there was a ladder leading up to it and there was a solid floor to sit on. Joe had discovered that, if he played very softly, he could go on for nearly an hour before his mother noticed. If she came up to the bathroom then, she'd stand at the attic door for a minute, waiting to be sure the toilet flushed properly. Then she'd call up the ladder.

"Joe Geddes, f'reaven's sake, stop that noise. Don't you ever get enough playing? You come down here and be sociable."

Going on down the stairs, sulkily, she'd keep it up.

"I don't know why you can't play with yasista sometimes. Or ask that Rose Dubrowsky overan play with her. I'm sure they both play very nice."

Joe could not explain to his mother the way he felt when he heard Hazel or Rose play the piano. He couldn't explain it to himself. But it was so pointless, so bloodless, so like people's endless words that rattled on without time or tune or emphasis. Or meaning. That's the way it sounded to Joe and he was glad that his job at the factory kept him out of the house while Hazel practiced. With Rose, he wasn't so sure. Maybe it wasn't just a musical thing with Rose. She wasn't much older than Hazel, but she seemed more like a *girl*, somehow.

He'd have to quit playing, though, after his mother noticed him. He'd sit in the darkening attic and think over tunes. It wasn't the same as playing them, but it was better than doing nothing about them at all. He'd store up ideas, setting them down precisely in his memory so that he could start right in on them next time. Then he'd come downstairs and go to bed.

It wasn't that he was lonely. He was too self-conscious and absorbed to be lonely. What he was looking for, though he was only conscious of its lack, not its identity, was that feeling of being at home, of having the thing you wanted in your own two hands, of sitting down someplace quietly and not feeling the need to get up and go someplace else pretty soon. This was the feeling he had had that night at Iowa City. He

had not forgotten it and he had not found it again. He found some of it in the attic at home, but always with the knowledge that his mother would end it soon. He found some of it with the band, as long as they played. But when they stopped, there was nothing else to listen to. The records? Yes, but you had to have the people to make it good. You had to have the right people, too.

Mame was the right people. But he was forbidden to see Mame. He'd been making out pretty good, walking past her house slowly on his way home from work, up the Path, and often enough, hearing her playing. Rose Dubrowsky had changed that. He couldn't refuse to walk home with Rose. He wouldn't have known how to do it, for one thing, and, for another, he didn't dare try to find out if she knew why he had always walked home from the factory up the steep Path. There was a wisdom in Rose Dubrowsky's large, fine eyes that Joe Geddes recognized, but didn't know what to do about.

Still, it was unthinkable to him not to be able to hear Mame play. It was also unthinkable to give Mame the slightest idea that there was any question about the desirability of Cozy and herself as friends of his. And so he developed, quite naturally, a protective slyness. He couldn't go in the daytime, of course, or Sundays or anything like that. He might be seen. By his family. Or by Rose Dubrowsky. But, at night, if he went down by the street that was not so steep, to the car track, and then cut back up the hill, ducking under the bushes, he could come out by the privy, back of the shack. The privy and the lean-to where Cozy slept when he was home covered him from being seen up on his street.

The only nights he could make it were nights when he said there was a dance someplace when there wasn't a dance at all. Dance nights were the only ones when he could get away with coming home at midnight or maybe even a little after. It no longer had anything to do with obeying his mother. It had to do with not letting her know. So, nights like that, he'd



get himself to Mame's door by this devious route, tap lightly, and say, "Good evening, Mame. Just thought I'd come along and listen a while to you play."

Mame never acted surprised, just opened the door and said, "Come right in, Joey." Sometimes her big arms would be whitened with flour because she was mixing bread dough. Sometimes she'd just be sitting there reading a magazine. But she always took him right in as if he was a part of whatever she was doing. If she was busy, she'd tell him to set a while or play the phonograph till she was through. He'd figured out the place by the piano which couldn't be seen from any of the windows and he'd sit there, on the floor.

"You don't need to sit on the floor," Mame said. "Why'n't you take this here rocker?"

"I'm tired." Joe had the answer all figured out, too. "I get tired in that old factory all day and I like to stretch out nights on the floor like this."

If Mame knew that wasn't the real reason she never let on. After a while, she'd go over and sit down at the piano. First she always sat for a minute with her legs spread apart, her palms turned inward on her thighs and her head down as if she was thinking. Then she'd clap her hands twice, whatever time she was going to play in, and start.

Things Joe liked best she'd play over and over for him. She didn't really like playing things over and over the same way, but she made a special effort to remember what she had played so he could learn it. It wasn't like a lesson. Neither of them said anything about learning or teaching. Joe would say, "What's that? What you doing there, Mame?" And she'd say, "What you mean, Joey? This?" And if that wasn't exactly it, she'd fool around till she remembered what it had been.

The only time anything was ever said about learning was the night Mame played a thing called *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie*. Lying there on the floor, Joe thought the piano was going to jump right out the window. The way the bass

pounded, it didn't seem possible for wood and ivory to stand it. Flesh and blood hardly could. Before she had finished, Joe was on his feet, watching her hands: the left one curved high over those bass notes that didn't move much, but sort of rocked in place; the right one slithered all over the top part of the piano. There was shouting in it, too. "THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!" That's the way every chorus ended, with Mame shouting out, "THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!"

"Geez!" said Joe. "What's that?"

"Thing called *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie*," Mame said. "Pug heard it in St. Louis. Showed it to me when he and Cozy was in last week."

"Sounds like drums, don't it? Say—did you say Cozy was in last week?"

Mame hadn't meant to say it, but she admitted she had.

"Why'n't you let me know?"

"Well, Joey, they was only here for the day and we didn't know whether you could rightly get away."

"I could get away to see Cozy," Joe said fiercely. "I wish you'd let me know."

And then, because he realized that Mame did understand, he went on quickly to talk about the music.

"It sure sounds like drums, don't it?" he said. "The way the bass keeps pounding, I mean. What'd you say it was?"

"*Pine Top's Boogie Woogie*. Pug heard this here Mr. Pine Top someplace in St. Louis, he said. Said he just sat down and played like this all night long. Said he told this Mr. Pine Top about him playing piano and got him to show how he did it."

"Play it again."

Mame played it again and the same excitement went through Joe. It was different from anything he'd ever heard. You couldn't escape the insistence of the bass. He couldn't go back to sitting on the floor. He closed his eyes and listened. His body moved slightly with the rhythm. When

Mame had finished this time—"THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!"—he said, "Where'd he ever learn a thing like that?"

"Probably just learned it hisself," Mame said. "It likely just come to him. Nobody learns niggers nothing. If nobody learns people nothing, they just gotta learn it theirselves."

"Yeah," Joe said. "I guess you're right. I guess . . ."

He looked up then and saw that he was facing the window right up towards his street. He dropped hastily to the floor and moved cautiously towards the piano without thinking. Mame got up from the piano and went and sat in the rocker. After a while, Joe said, "Well, I guess I better get going."

"G'night, Joey," Mame said.

He went out the door and sneaked round back as usual, but he didn't feel like going home. There was a big lilac bush beside the cleared place where Mame grew her lettuce and tomatoes and cabbages and onions and stuff. The bush must never have been pruned because it was thick with leaves all the way down to about two feet off the ground. Joe threw himself on the ground beneath the lilac bush and waited for the excitement of the music to pass. And for the sadness to pass, too—the sadness he felt because Mame knew why he sneaked up to her door and lay on the floor and everything. And she never said a word. He didn't understand it well enough to be mad about it and anyhow he had no way to express how he felt. Just knowing about it wasn't enough, but it was all he had and it made him sad.

He lay there for a while, not even able to think about it very clearly because that boogie woogie bass was in his head. Then he heard Mame start to play again. She played slow things, blue things, at first. She played them low and mean and dirty. She played them exactly the way he felt himself. But then she worked out of it and finished with *Runnin' Wild* and *Tiger Rag*.

Joe envied her, being able to sit down like that and play

whenever she felt like it. He wanted his own horn so bad it was like a clutching in his middle. But the urge went away as he listened to Mame play and, after an hour or so, he was able to go home and sleep soundly. After that, he went down when he could and lay under the lilac bush, listening.

He was lying there one night, listening to Mame's blues and feeling mellow. He was lying on his back and he could see millions of stars filling the Iowa sky, scattered like diamond sand. How could they be so many and so bright? The leaves of the lilac bush stirred and Rose Dubrowsky came and stood beside him.

"H'lo, Joe," she said.

He looked around, startled at this unexpected invasion.

"Oh, h'lo," he said.

She stood there by the lilac bush and ran one hand through her thick black hair. She wore it up in the daytime, but it was down now, and loose around her shoulders. The light from Mame's window shone full on her face, but left her body in darkness. She might have been just a head standing there. Joe pulled at her skirt.

"Listen," he said. "Sit down. Somebody'll see you."

She sat down beside him.

"Like who, Joey? Who you scared of, Joey?"

"I'm not scared of anybody. Who'd you think?"

"Oh, I don't know. Only when you have to sneak down here like this . . ."

Her voice trailed off deliberately. She *did* know. Well, what's it to her?

"Shut up! You want somebody to hear you?"

"Not especially. After all, I sneaked off, too."

"Well, shut up then."

She pulled her legs up under her and leaned back so her head brushed the lilac leaves.

"Don't make so much noise!"

"Joe, what's the matter with you?"

"Don't talk so loud!"

"Okay, but if I were you, I'd say you better be nicer to me."

"Listen, I *am* nice to you. Don't I walk you home from the factory every evening?"

"Yes, but then you run away like this at night."

"Listen, if you can't be quiet, you'll have to go away. This is my place."

"Okay, Joe. I'll be quiet. Jesus, I'll be glad to be quiet. You ought to hear the fight that's going on up at my house. The old man's drunk and so are the boys. . . ."

"Shut up!"

"Okay, Joe. It's nice here. Nice and quiet. No wonder you sneak off here. Gee, am I tired working in that old factory!"

"You're no tireder of it than I am."

"I know, Joey. That's why I wish you'd let me stay. I can't go home now, Joe. Pop'd beat me up, too."

There was a sob in her voice. She remembered to keep it quiet, but it was a sob just the same.

"Okay. Okay. But you'll have to be—say, how'd you find this place anyhow?"

"I followed you, Joe. I followed you before and I knew where you come. So tonight, I was so lonely, I just came down. Jesus, I don't know what to do with myself in this town."

Rose began to cry, remembering to keep it quiet.

"Joey, don't be mean to me."

"I'm not mean to you. I'm not *anything* to you."

"You are, too, mean. You keep hollering at me and I just want to be quiet and stay here with you. I'm afraid to go home, Joe."

She touched his arm, and he pulled away.

"You're the one that's hollering. You can stay if you keep quiet, if you're afraid to go home. But keep quiet. I want to listen to the music."

Mame was playing *Tin Roof Blues*, coming down steady on a run and then shaking the notes back and forth in a

roll. Rose stretched out beside Joe and sighed. She didn't mind listening to music. She liked music. But she liked Joe Geddes better.

"What'd you follow me for anyway?" Joe said after a minute.

"I often follow you."

"What for? To tell on me, I bet."

"Joey! That's a mean thing to say. I won't tell on you. I just like to follow you. I don't know why. Because you never pay any attention to me. Don't you *like* me, Joey?"

"Sure. Why not? Long as you don't go shooting off your mouth about me."

"I said I wouldn't, Joey. Only you ought to be nicer to me. Don't you *like* me?"

"Listen, I said I liked you. Only you talk too much."

The treble was going up in thirds now, easy and rolling. Then the bass took it over, pounding with a strong accent on an off beat.

"Joey . . ."

"Will you ever shut up!"

He moved his head slightly from side to side with the rhythm of Mame's playing. She came in with a repeated lick just then, bearing down on the notes hard, then sliding off impudently and just touching the same note twelve times with a little tickling touch. Joe felt a broad smile spread his mouth across his face.

"Joey?"

"Yeah."

"You do like me a little bit, don't you?"

"Sure I like you. I like everybody, long as they let me alone."

"If you liked me, Joe, you'd move over a little closer to me."

"I'm okay the way I am."

"Well, then, I guess I'll have to move over closer to you."

She slithered across the foot of grass that separated them. Her shoulder just touched his own.

"There!" she said. "Isn't that better?"

"If you don't keep quiet, I'll bat you one."

Mame had started back at the beginning of *Tin Roof*. She picked up the tempo just a trifle, decided she didn't like it that way, and went back to the other, slower tempo. Joe understood what she was doing. It was better slower. She tried the melody in the bass. It sounded unhappy that way, unhappy, with a great yearning. She moved back up to the treble.

Joe listened, but it disturbed his listening to have Rose so close. Even when she was perfectly quiet, it disturbed him. It made him conscious of his surroundings. It wakened his senses other than hearing so that he smelled the sourness of the privy and the flesh-warmed grass. He smelled the tomato smell, too, that clung to their shoes, hands, and clothes—a smell that hung over all this part of town when the factory was working.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Rose. He could see the way the light from Mame's window fell in a line across her legs, above the high-heeled slippers, shining on the silk of her stockings. He saw a dim light reflection on her face. Her lips were full and red and her black hair lay along the grass near him. Even in among the tomato smell he could smell Rose's hair, a heavy, breath-stopping smell. He felt the prickle of the short grass through his shirt and the brush of an insect against his hand. He felt the heat of the Iowa summer night, tired after its fierce burning through the day. He felt alive, now, in his own tiredness, and the music sounded against the back of his mind, like music in a movie, less important than the watched events it accompanies and seeks to heighten.

When she moved even closer to him and put her hand on his arm again, he wanted to push her away. He lacked the will to do so. He let the liquid rhythm of Mame's music and

the feel of the grass and the look of Rose's ankles in the light and the smell of her hair wash his mind and his will away.

"Put your arms around me, Joey."

He put one arm around her. It was amazing how soft and warm she was. How nice, even smelling the way she did of hair and tomatoes. His right hand closed over her shoulder. His left hand lay awkwardly by his side. Her hand sought his left hand and placed it over her breast and a shock went through him. He grew very warm all over and his body began to move within him. She laughed softly.

"Poor little Joey! He doesn't know what to do about it!"

Her low laugh infuriated him and he put both arms around her and held her under him, hard.

"Well?" she said.

She helped him, then, and as they came together, he had a quick, terrifying feeling that he had shouted. He looked up. Nothing had changed. The clear tones of the piano swung out in the darkness undisturbed. The stars twinkled and fluttered in the sky. The grass and the privy and the tomato smell were still there. Nothing had changed.

Presently his head fell to the curve of her shoulder so that his chin rested against her warm neck and his cheek felt the grass cool beneath it.

"You're heavy," she said. And he was glad to be lying by himself again, quiet and relaxed and very, very tired. From some distant place the music came back to his ears. It came back slowly, a remembered sound from far off at first. Then it came closer and knocked sharply on the door of his consciousness. The door flew open and the music entered, bright and loud and welcome.

Mame was playing *Runnin' Wild* and making it sound like a glad, new tune. She was filling in all the rests with richness and impudence. He listened. He laughed out loud.

"What's funny?"

"You hear what she's doing?" Joe said. "She's playing that piano like a cornet!"



## Chapter V

"YOU'RE GETTING TOO GOOD FOR US, JOE," was what Frank Linder said. The Muscatine Friars Rhythm Band had just finished a very noisy thing in which Joe Geddes played a lot and very fast. Frank Linder leaned out from behind the drum and he spoke admiringly. Rose was standing quite close to the band and she distinctly heard what Frank Linder said and it was "You're getting too good of us, Joe."

Rose had persuaded Jack Wheelock, the rig boss, to take her to the dance because she wanted to find out for herself if Joey was as good as she thought he was. Apparently he was. Too good for Frank Linder even. Too good for Muscatine.

"Who can dance to that noisy stuff, baby?" Jack Wheelock said. "Let's go someplace where it's nice and quiet, huh, baby?"

Rose went with Jack, but that was the last time. She didn't have to be nice to Jack Wheelock any more. She had her job at the factory and it was enough money to buy silk stockings and earrings and a satin dress. Her plans had changed and she wouldn't need so much money now. She had been right about Joe Geddes.

The Monday morning after the dance, Rose looked out, with even greater interest, at Joe Geddes working in the shaded gloom of the platform where the tomato rigs were. She heard Jack Wheelock hollering at him. "Get the lead out of your pants, Joey. You're letting more bad ones than good go through!"

Rose laughed to herself. Let Jack Wheelock holler at him. Let Jack Wheelock be the big boss of the tomato rigs. Joe Geddes wasn't hanging around any tomato factory all his life.

Joe Geddes wasn't hanging around a hick town like Muscatine all his life. He was too good for them all and he was going to get away and make a lot of money and be famous. And Rose Geddes—that had been Dubrowsky—was going with him. She had picked her man and she had got him. Everything was fine and Rose Geddes—Dubrowsky at the moment—sang at her work.

"You happy, Rose?"

That would be Mrs. Morelli, working at the next tub.

"You sing because you happy, Rose? I like hear young girl sing. You in love, maybe, Rose?"

Mrs. Morelli sighed a deep sigh and bent over for another tomato. Rose didn't answer, just smiled and went on singing. You couldn't carry on much of a conversation over the rattle of the rigs outside. And Rose didn't want to talk to Mrs. Morelli anyhow. She didn't want to talk to any of them in the factory. You take Mrs. Morelli now. Mrs. Morelli was fat and dumpy and her hair was tied up on her head like an old scrub brush. She had four kids and a husband who drank. What did Mrs. Morelli get out of life? Working in a tomato factory and worrying about the time when the season would be over and they'd all be fired.

Not Rose Dubrowsky. Geddes to be. With Rose it was going to be different. Mostly because she wasn't going in for any of this love stuff. Two years ago, when she was fourteen, she might have. She wanted to believe it as much as anybody else when she read about this love stuff in the magazines and saw it in the movies. Sure, she had two brothers that worked in the button factory, and she heard them talking about girls and it wasn't the way it told in the stories or showed in the movies. But she still wanted to think it was true, when she was fourteen, and she tried to find out for herself. She found out, all right, from a boy at school who promised her anything she wanted if she'd just go into the cemetery with him and make love. Would he take her to Davenport? Sure he would. To—to Chicago maybe, even if it was only for just a

day? Sure he would. She went into the cemetery, but she was frightened and cried and after a while he got tired and got up and started to walk away.

"You said you'd take me to Chicago!"

He laughed.

"Listen you little sissy," he said. "When I'm hard, I'm soft, and when I'm soft, I'm hard."

It was only an old, dirty joke, but Rose didn't know that when she was fourteen. She cried some more, but after a while she stopped that and thought about it. If this was making love, it sure didn't work out very well for girls. She'd get what she wanted all right, but not with that love stuff. How then? What did you do if you were a girl?

When Rose was fifteen, a teacher at school told her about Madame Curie. For a brief period, Rose considered being another Madame Curie. When she mentioned it at home, her brothers laughed for hours. Wasn't it enough she could read and write and play the piano and was even going to high school? More than her mother did. More than girls and women needed. A woman doing all those things Rose's teacher said. Being famous. Getting prizes. It was more than a fellow could stand. It was not to be believed. "Madame Dubrowscurie," her brothers called her for days. "Well, how is Madame Dubrowscurie today? Win any new prizes?" "What does Madame Dubrowscurie think of the weather today? Will it rain, does Madame Dubrowscurie think?" Things like that. No, it sure wasn't easy for a girl. She wouldn't be any Madame Curie. Madame Dubrowscurie. It would take too long anyhow if she had to study all those books. Rose would get what she wanted while she was still young and good-looking. But how?

She knew how by the time she was sixteen. She knew, by the time she was sixteen, that she wasn't going to be pushed around by men all her life because she was a girl. She would find men who would give her what she wanted and not push her around, but not in Muscatine, Iowa. She would go where

they were and she would find them. They would be swells. Rich people. Even gangsters. She saw gangsters in movies and their girls were always dressed the way Rose would like to dress. The gangsters were silent and ruthless and smart, and their girls were good-looking and well-dressed and smart. They got what they wanted all right, even if it did always say that crime didn't pay. Didn't pay what and to whom? How about if you were good-looking enough and smart enough and knew what you wanted enough? And, of course, picked the right man. Picking the right man was essential for a girl.

The rattle and clang of the rigs was slowing down now and that meant time to quit. Rose reached down behind her tub for her pocketbook and got out her little mirror.

"You look pretty for him, Rose," Mrs. Morelli said and sighed again. Sigh all you want, Mrs. Morelli. Sigh your lungs out for being so dumb. Sure Rose was pretty. She had her father's good looks—his thick black hair and fine skin and gray eyes that looked slate blue in the daytime but very dark at night. Handsome Jan Dubrowsky, who had brought a young bride from Poland to share the riches of America with him. Handsome Jan Dubrowsky, who shared a factory worker's wages with his young bride, now a tired, shapeless woman who waited on her men with hands swollen at the finger joints and feet flat and dragging in wool stockings that she knit herself. None of that for handsome Jan Dubrowsky's daughter.

Rose put away her mirror, said "G'night, Mrs. Morelli," and went out quickly to catch up with Joe. Jack Wheelock was waiting, as usual, in that dark place in the hall. With an expert flounce, she managed to get past him.

"Say, Rose," he called, "a bunch of us are going on a little party tonight. How about coming along?"

"Gee, Jack. I'm sorry. I can't tonight."

"Gonna be quite a party, baby."

"I'm awful sorry, Jack. Some other time."

You had to be a little nice to the boss, after all.

By hurrying once she was out on the road, she caught up with Joe.

"I thought I'd never get out of that place. The way that Jack Wheelock keeps bothering me!"

"He keeps bothering everybody. He's not happy unless he's yelling at somebody."

This was not exactly what Rose had meant to imply, but she let it go. With a fellow like Joe Geddes, you didn't talk the way you did with other fellows. You didn't talk much at all. It was a little uncomfortable, but that was the way he liked it. He was thinking about his music all the time and since his music was the thing that was going to make him rich and famous, let him think. They walked on in silence till they got nearly to the top of the hill, to their street. They didn't walk close together or anything. It would never have occurred to Joe to touch Rose except nights, under the lilac bush. At the corner, she said, quietly, "Tonight, Joe?"

"Okay."

They turned off, casually, at their separate steps. No use giving their parents any ideas they were anything but just neighbors.

They met a couple of nights a week under the lilac bush now. The factory was beginning to work longer hours and Joe had to give up the band. He still played dances, but he couldn't always manage rehearsals every Monday and Thursday night. He never knew when they'd have to work. It depended on the tomatoes. Sometimes he'd go back to the factory after supper and work till nine. Then he'd meet Rose up on the hill behind Mame's shack. It was pleasant lying there, and Joe often thought that it would be pretty swell if things could always be like this, with Rose to make him feel so good and his saxophone to play whenever he liked. He was used to Rose at night like this, and he could talk to her in the dark quite freely. He was pleased to have somebody to listen to him and so he talked well and often said quite wise things.

"It would be pretty okay if a fellow didn't have to do

anything but lie here like this and play his sax any time he wanted to."

"It's okay now," Rose said, lying quiet beside him. There was no music tonight because it was late and Mame had gone to bed. It seemed strange to Joe without the music.

"Yeah, but there's always tomorrow and you gotta go back to that damned factory."

"Some day," Rose said, "you won't have to do a thing but play your sax and they'll pay you a lot for it, too."

"Yeah," Joe said. "Only I don't think any of those guys get paid a lot. Not Cozy or Pug anyhow."

"Oh, not around here. But I bet in Chicago, say, they pay them a lot."

"I guess so. Chicago's a big place."

"Chicago's wonderful, I bet. Not like this stinking old Muscatine."

"Yeah, I bet."

"Wouldn't you like to go to Chicago, Joe?"

"Oh, sure."

Take it easy, Rose. When he's soft, he's hard.

"I bet you'd be the best saxophone player in Chicago."

"Not while Coleman Hawkins is around."

"Who?"

"Coleman Hawkins. He's the best tenor man in the world, I guess."

"I bet he's not any better than you, Joe."

"Don't talk silly."

"Well, I bet he isn't."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Forget it."

"He's probably a lot older than you. When you get that old . . ."

"Maybe."

"And then you'll be the best in Chicago."

"When I can play it the way I want it, so it's like walking and running and standing still and yelling and—well, and everything—then it'll be okay."

"Then we'll go to Chicago?"

Look out, Rose. Too soon to say that.

"Sure."

She moved closer to him and they stopped talking about Chicago.

September came, in a blur of moving tomatoes and pounding machinery and the smell of spices and ketchup everywhere. Joe hadn't gone back to school. Rose hadn't either. Not yet. You had special permission to go back to school late if you worked in the tomato factory. The look and the smell of tomatoes were in Joe's eyes and nose all the time now. He was always tired and sleepy because often he only slept three or four hours. If they worked till eleven, Rose would catch up with him on the way home. They'd stop by the place on the hill and it would be early in the morning when he got to bed. He could always say he worked late as long as he went home eventually. His mother was so used to it by now that she didn't even wake up when he came in.

One night, though, he didn't come home at all.

It was a Sunday night and he wasn't tired for once. The season was beginning to slacken and the factory was closed on Sunday for the first time in weeks. He slept till nearly noon and then he had a big dinner and then he slept some more in the afternoon. It rained a little, early in the afternoon, and for a while he was afraid it would be too wet to meet Rose. But the sun came out again after his nap and he went out in the back alley to pitch shoes with his father and the Dubrowsky boys. Rose and her mother sat on the back porch and watched them for a while. He and Rose never talked to each other much in front of the others, but she managed to get his eye and nod so he'd be there for sure. Rose's eyes were puffy, as if she'd been crying. Sleeping late, probably.

About nine, he told his mother he had to go over to Frank's, and set off down the hill. He felt fine. For two cents, he'd walk right down to Mame's, go in and say howdy

and ask her to play. Some day—this would be a long time from now, of course—he'd walk right in her front door and plop down a hundred dollars right on the piano. He'd be wearing white pants and a blue coat and he'd have a gold saxophone all carved along the front.

"Here, Mame," he'd say carelessly because he'd have so much money it wouldn't make any difference to him, a hundred dollars more or less. "Here, Mame," he'd say, "this is for all those lessons you gave me when I was a kid."

And Mame would say, "You take back your money, Joey. Them wasn't rightly lessons. Them was just playing."

Or no. Mame would probably understand. She'd throw her head back and laugh so her teeth were white against her red tongue. "A hundred dollars, Joey!" she'd say. "You mean you earned all that money with your horn! Well, Joey, you come a long ways!"

Then she'd go out and spend the hundred dollars. He'd buy Mame a new piano, too—a baby grand. Only then he'd have to buy her someplace to put it. Funny, seemed you had to start right at the bottom and work up, to fix things right for swell people like Mame that didn't have anything to start with. But he'd do it. He'd get out of this tomato town and do it. Like Rose said, you had to get out of this town before you could really do anything, have anything, learn anything.

By the time he got to the bottom of the hill, the streetcar had reached the end of the line and one passenger got off. Joe was surprised to see that it was Old Dill. He would rather just have said hello and kept on going. But Joe wasn't much good at the social graces and he didn't know how to do that. Old Dill came right up beside him and recognized him and said hello, and then there was nothing to do but keep right on walking, alongside of him, on towards the tomato factory.

"I hope you'll be coming back to school soon," Old Dill said.

"Yes, sir, I will, when the tomatoes are done," said Joe.



They were coming to the spot where he always ducked up the hill.

"It's too bad you can't practice in the summer."

"Sure I can, Mr. Dilworth. I got a sax of my own now."

They had passed the place where he always ducked up the hill. He didn't dare duck.

"That's fine, Joe. That's fine."

They were almost to the factory now. One of them was going to have to break away. If they kept on like this, they'd go up over the woods road, past the factory.

"So you're going to be a musician!"

Old Dill's voice sounded sad, but it was a sadness with an excitement in it, Joe thought. "Yes, but not like you, you old *Poet and Peasant*," he said to himself.

"Listen," he said abruptly out loud. "I got to go up here. G'bye."

He turned off at the factory, crossed the road and got out from under the street light. Then he waited till Old Dill disappeared up the woods road. Maybe he was just going for a walk. Funny thing, though. Old Dill must have a family somewhere in Muscatine. You'd think he'd spend Sunday night at home.

Mame was playing *Copenhagen* when Joe ducked under the lilac bush. Rose was already there.

"I ran into Old Dill," he said by way of explanation as he sat down beside her. "Geez! I thought I'd never get away."

"Was he drunk?" Rose said. "He drinks."

"Well, what of it?"

He didn't want Old Dill criticized. He liked Old Dill and he liked the way he had asked Joe about being a musician. He liked *Copenhagen*, too. It was a swell number. When Mame played that bass run up to the seventh, it almost sounded like the trombone on the record. He stretched out beside Rose and listened.

"Joe . . ."

"Huh?"

"Joe, you going back to school?"

"Oh, sure. Got another year yet."

"What's a year? I can think of better things to do than go back to school."

"Like what?"

"Like going up to Chicago, for instance."

She put her hand across his chest and slid it along his ribs, not lightly so as to tickle, but firmly, so as to arouse. Joe stopped trying to memorize that break after Mame's bass run.

"Chicago? That's a long ways off. Maybe after I get through school . . ."

"Oh, school! That baby stuff. You aren't going to learn any more about playing the saxophone at school. Why, I bet you could get a job playing the saxophone in Chicago right now—tomorrow."

He turned toward her and slipped an arm under her waist.

"Sure," he said, and laughed.

The music receded, but not so far that Joe didn't realize when Mame changed tunes. By the time he came away from Rose, Mame had progressed through *Copenhagen*, *Careless Love*, *Chicago*, and *Fidgety Feet*. She was playing *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie* now and the hammering bass lent Joe an energy he did not feel. While he lay relaxed and inert on the grass, a part of him was doing ghostly stompings to the music.

"Joe . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Joe, why couldn't we go to Chicago instead of going back to school?"

"Well, for one thing, because I gotta pay for my sax yet. Can't go to Chicago without my sax, can I?"

This wasn't getting any place. This was beginning to remind Rose of that time in the cemetery. And she wasn't being fooled in any cemetery any more.

"But you will take me to Chicago with you, Joe?"

"Oh, sure. We'll paint that toddlin' town red when we go to Chicago."

They were words from a tune called *Chicago*. "Chicago, Chicago, that toddlin' town." Joe laughed at himself using words out of a song in ordinary conversation.

"Joe, I'm through with this town. I don't want to go back to school. I want to get out of this town and I want to go to Chicago."

"Hey, look, not so fast. What's the big hurry?"

It was no hurry with Rose. It was the natural outcome of nearly three months' planning with Rose.

"I don't know what's such a hurry about it," Rose said. "We've been going together nearly all summer. Anyhow, I think my mother's getting suspicious. She was giving me a long lecture this afternoon about girls getting married and not running around. She nearly drove me crazy with her lecturing!"

"Getting married! Why, you're just a kid!"

"Just a kid! Well, I like that. You listen to me, Joe Geddes, don't you go saying I'm just a kid after the way you been going on all summer. With me, I mean. With just a kid like you're saying!"

Joe looked at her curiously. He knew old man Dubrowsky had a terrible temper and so did the boys. You could hear them hollering lots of nights next door. But he'd never connected it with Rose. Well, yes, some nights he used to hear her hollering, too. But not with him. She'd always been very peaceful and ladylike with him.

"I didn't mean anything bad, Rose," Joe said.

"Well, maybe you didn't, but there's something I'd like to tell you about, Joe Geddes. You're going to have to take me to Chicago with you pretty soon because I'm going to have a baby!"

Mame was on the last chorus of *Pine Top's Boogie Woogie*, just winding up. "THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT!" Mame shouted in an excess of exuberance. Then the music stopped.

"Joey! Didn't you hear what I said? I said I'm going to have a baby!"

"Yes, I heard you, but—"

"But what?"

"But gee, Rose, I can't believe it!"

"Oh, you can't believe it! The great Mr. Geddes can't believe it! You better believe it, Joe Geddes, because now you'll *have* to marry me and take me to Chicago, that's what!"

"Oh, say, I can't do that."

"What do you mean you can't?"

"I can't. I don't want to. I won't."

Rose got up and straightened her hair back from her face with her hands.

"We'll see about that," she said. "You wait till I tell my mother and father. They'll tell your father and mother and then we'll see about that."

Joe knew they would, too. He could hear it all in his head. His mother's shrill screaming about the disgrace and contaminating Hazel and about him being a bum and so on. His father getting red in the face, he'd be so mad. And the Dubrowskys jabbering in Polish. Geez! He hadn't meant to ruin a girl, like they said. He must have been crazy. You knew these things happened, but you didn't think about them happening to you. If he married Rose, he'd end up like all the other people he knew and couldn't stand. Houses with kids in them and porches to be scrubbed and canvas baby carriages on the back steps and going to work every morning and bringing your pay envelope home every Saturday night. And a woman running everything. Well Rose, anyhow. No!

"Listen, Rose," he said. "I don't know what to do."

"There's nothing else *to* do, Joey."

"Well, maybe, but—don't call me Joey!"

"You don't have to get so mad about it. Everybody gets married."

"Listen, Rose, it's just that it's a surprise to me."

"What's so surprising about it? You know what happens."

"Well, sure, but—"

"Pity you didn't stop to think about that before. Oh, no! Before it was easy. Just have fun and never mind about afterwards."

"No, Rose, listen. It wasn't like that. I guess I just didn't think."

"Well, you can start thinking now, Joey Geddes."

"Yes, I can. Rose, go away, will you? Go away. I got to think. And *stop* calling me Joey!"

He flopped over on his face.

"Well . . ." Rose said. Joe thought she sounded pleased now. Her voice came to him with a pleased sound. She sounded, he thought, like his mother that Saturday morning his father licked him. He didn't move.

"I gotta go home anyhow, my mother's so suspicious. I'll wait till tomorrow before I say anything. I'll see you tomorrow at the factory and you can tell me what you thought out. You think real hard, Joey. G'night, Joey."

He heard the leaves rustle as she went down the hill. Then everything was very quiet. The light went out in Mame's shack and he guessed it must be getting late. He tried to think. He tried to think what he ought to do. But he was getting cramped lying there and the September night was chilly. He got up and went down the hill himself. He started towards home, but he couldn't bring himself to do it, so he turned in the opposite direction, towards the factory. He kept right on up the woods road.

He'd walked maybe a mile before he came upon Old Dill. Old Dill was sitting right on the edge of the dirt road with his back against the arc-light pole and his feet straight out in front of him. He had a flat bottle across his vest, holding it with both hands. His head had fallen down on one shoulder and at first Joe thought, in sudden panic, that he might be dead. He shook him, hard.

"Mr. Dilworth!"

The man roused and lifted his head and opened his eyes. A wisp of thin hair stood up in the middle of his head in a point and gave him a playful look.

"Oh, geez!" Joe said, in quick relief. Then, "It's me. Joe Geddes, Mr. Dilworth. You better let me take you home."

"Home," said Mr. Dilworth in a queer voice that Joe had never heard before. "Along comes this fellow and he wants to take me home." He began to sing. "Goin' home . . . goin' home . . . I ain't goin' home . . ."

He laughed to himself, slyly. He certainly drank, like Rose said. He was certainly drunk now.

"I'm not drunk, mind you," he said, shaking his finger at Joe, startling him. "I am merely lapping up Lethe. Lethe, my boy, is a river in Hades. Hades. 'Pack up your sins and go to the devil in Hades' is a song by Irving Berlin. 'Pack up your sins and go to the devil in Hades, You'll meet the finest of gentlemen and the finest of ladies,'" he sang again in a high, cracked voice. When he stopped, he tapped the empty bottle on his stomach. "Genuine forgetting water from the river Hades," he said. "Have some?"

"No, thanks," Joe said and sat down. He took the bottle and threw it away over his shoulder. It made a rattle and a rustle in the bushes. He could think here as well as anywhere, he guessed. Old Dill was really drunk if he'd finished that whole bottle himself.

"You're pensive, Joe Geddes," Old Dill said. He sure talked funny when he was drunk like this. "But youth may well be pensive. Plenty of time for pensivity to turn to bitterness with age." He laughed to himself. "Pensivity," he repeated, still laughing.

"Youth should give up pensivity," he went on after a while. "Youth has the world before it. Youth and talent. Youth and talent should get out of this god-damned, dead-duck, bitched, buried town before it's too late."

"Get out of this town," Joe said. "Yeah. That's what

everybody's saying tonight. Fine chance. Big chance I've got."

"Get out of this town while there is nothing to tie you down, no weight around your neck, nobody to hold you back."

"That's all you know," said Joe. But Old Dill seemed to be carrying on a conversation of his own. He wasn't paying any attention to what Joe said.

"Get out, young man. Get out and go your separate ways."

"I might as well be talking to myself," Joe said. "What in hell am I going to do? I can't get myself tied down with a wife and kid—at seventeen! Seventeen—and I haven't even got a good vibrato yet!"

"Don't you do it, Joe!" Old Dill sat up suddenly and put his arm on Joe's shoulder.

"Hey, I didn't even think you were paying any attention to me!"

"I'm drunk. But not as drunk as I'd like to be. Just trying awful hard. I hear things when they're that important."

"Important to who?" Joe was embarrassed because he had talked so much, so he acted mad.

"To you. And to me." Old Dill held himself steady by leaning one hand against the arc-light pole. "Gotta pull myself together," he said. "Gotta save this boy."

"I'm not asking any favors from you or anybody!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Joe. You listen to me. I could have been a good musician. I could have gone to New York when I was nineteen, not seventeen like you. I was good, too. But I had a wife and baby to make a living for. A show fellow wanted to take me to New York, but I had to earn a living to pay the rent and the milk and the butcher and the rent and . . ."

He let his head drop to his knees. His thin body was shaking with sobs and he beat his legs with his fists. "I was good," he said weakly, "fifteen years ago. . . ."

"Geez, Mr. Dilworth, I'm sorry!"

Joe didn't know what else to say so he just sat. Once he patted Mr. Dilworth's head awkwardly. It must be pretty bad when you wanted something that bad and let it get away from you. The knowledge kept Joe from feeling ashamed for Mr. Dilworth, a grown man, crying. Joe wanted to cry, too, but from confusion, not remorse. He'd be over thirty in fifteen years. He'd have a kid nearly as big as he was right now. Maybe he'd have a whole bunch of kids. He'd have to work in the tomato factory or the button factory to make a living for them and pay the rent and the milk and the butcher. . . . No Chicago. No music—with a wife and kids. The years went by in a rush of stormy wind for Joe and he saw himself in fifteen years being like Old Dill—Old Dill they all made fun of because of his shuffling walk and his droopy shoulders. They'd call him Old Gedd. Thinking about it strangled him.

Old Dill sat up then and blew his nose on a dirty handkerchief.

"Don't you do it, Joe," he said.

"Well, what can I do?"

"Run away. Get out of here. Go right away now and don't ever come back."

He'd have to go away right now if he went. He couldn't wait till tomorrow.

"Yeah, that's fine," he said. "Go away where?"

"Chicago."

Yes, of course. Chicago. Where Jig and those other guys were. Where Cozy and Pug went on the boats. Where Rose wanted to go. Chicago was a big place, but he could do it with just himself. She'd never find him if he went to Chicago. He'd find those other guys, somehow or other, but Rose would never find him.

"Yeah," he said. "Chicago. But how?"

Old Dill reached a slightly unsteady hand in his pocket.

"Here's five . . . six . . . seven dollars. You got any money?"



"I got the three dollars to pay on my sax—oh, gee! My sax!"

"You'll have to have your sax."

"Yeah. I'll have to go home and get it. I snuck in before and I guess I can sneak in again before it gets light. I'll have to, anyhow."

"You're all set, Joe. You're on your way. Let's go."

"I can't take your money, Mr. Dilworth."

"Don't talk nonsense, Joe. Some day you'll pay me back. Let's go."

They started down the woods road together. Old Dill walked straight enough and he didn't droop his head the way he always did at school.

"I feel fine about this. Do you feel fine about it, Joe Geddes?"

"Well, not right this minute I don't. I guess I'll feel fine when I get to Chicago. Maybe."

When they parted at the street that led up to Joe's house, they stopped and shook hands.

"I envy you, Joe Geddes," said Old Dill. "I envy you."

"Well, thanks, Mr. Dilworth. Thanks for the money. I'll pay you back just as soon as I get a job. I'll get along all right, I guess. G'bye, Mr. Dilworth. And thanks."

Then he slipped off his shoes and socks and went on up the hill.

## Chapter VI

JOE GEDDES COULD NEVER HAVE TOLD YOU how it happened that he found them that first day in Chicago. He could only have told you that he walked and that he listened.

He didn't step off the Rock Island train and start walking and listening right away. He got as far as the door of the railroad station and then the roar of Chicago hit him in the face like a fast-pitched ball. Hit him and drove him back into the station. He sat in the station for an hour, trying to get up enough courage to face the roar of Chicago that seemed to be saying to him: "I'm big and I'm powerful and I'm rich and I smash fellows who come here with nothing but an imitation leather case stuffed with socks and shirts and a saxophone!" He had come to Chicago to escape an awful fate. The fate did not look nearly so awful to him now as Chicago did. He washed his hands and face in the men's room and he spent too much for something to eat in the station restaurant. Then he went out on the streets of Chicago and started to walk.

He knew where it was he wanted to go. That is, he knew he wanted to go where there were musicians. He knew the names of some of the places where musicians would be. Names he had heard Cozy and Pug and Jig Carson and those guys use in Iowa City. Names like Sunset Cafe, Midway Gardens, Dreamland, the Plantation. Those were the names of places where musicians worked. He remembered the names of streets like State and Washington and Calumet. There was a tune called *35th and Calumet*. There was another tune called *Sunset Cafe Stomp*. He remembered something else, too. He remembered how Pug had found the

Kappa Sig house that night. He had listened—and when he heard the music, that was it.

One thing against him, he knew, was that it was daytime. Musicians didn't work in the daytime. No matter how hard he listened, he wouldn't be able to hear any musicians till after dark. It might take him all day to get to wherever they were, though, so he started to walk.

It was on the South Side he wanted to be. But where was this South Side? The signs he saw on the street corners didn't say. And he didn't see any streetcars that were marked in any helpful way. Finally, he got up enough nerve to go out in the middle of a street where there was a traffic cop.

"Excuse me," he said. The cop was big and filled out his blue coat till the seams stretched. But he didn't hear, or even see Joe, who then tapped him timidly on the shoulder. He turned, scowling.

"Excuse me," Joe said again.

This time the cop leaned toward him, but kept blowing his whistle and waving a hand to the roaring traffic at the same time. Joe yelled as loudly as he could, "Is this the South Side?"

"Take that streetcar over there, going *that* way," the cop yelled back, gesturing vaguely across the street where there was, Joe saw, a streetcar.

"Thank you very much," he began to mumble, backing away from the cop and bumping into a girl with a suitcase, very red lips, and a determined look.

"Why'n't you watch where you're going, kid?" she said, looking at Joe angrily, pushing past him to yell at the cop, "Where's the nearest El stop?" She found out and Joe, fascinated with terror, watched her thread her way across the street, jammed with cars going both ways, without waiting for the traffic to stop. She reached the opposite curb safely, though, with only one small new scratch on her suitcase from the cruising taxi that had come closest to her en route.

Joe waited till the traffic stopped. Then he crossed the street, too. But he was afraid to take the streetcar. He was afraid of the variations of "Why'n't you watch where you're going, kid?" that he was sure awaited him every time he got in the way of these busy Chicagoans. So he just kept walking in the direction the streetcar had gone.

It was past noon now, and he moved in a funnel of heat and noise and exhaust fumes. The horn hung at the end of his arm, a dead weight, but when he shifted it, he felt that people stared. Once a couple of kids no older than himself, lounging against a street sign, said, "Whatcha got there, kid—a tommy gun?" He would have run then, had his fear and his burden and his agony of self-consciousness permitted. Instead, he walked faster and turned a corner to get away from the watching eyes of the two lounging kids.

But he kept on going in the same direction, as near as he could make out, past rows of dingy stores, past warehouses as awkward as elephants balancing on cobbled streets, past huge garages in which trucks snorted and bellowed, or—worse still—out of which trucks rumbled on to the streets, monsters whose insides breathed heavily in pain, whose joints clanked and creaked in rusty protest.

By the middle of the afternoon, the look of the strange streets had changed. It was quieter in these streets where people, not trucks and streetcars, moved. Joe had lost track of his particular car line by now, and felt lost. So he stood on a corner and waited, watching for a face that looked kind enough to answer him if he could get up enough courage to ask for directions. He waited quite a while, leaning against his sax case, until an elderly woman came along, not very well-dressed, with a calm, pleasant face. She was carrying a black-mesh shopping bag, folded neatly under her arm.

Joe managed to say, "Excuse me, ma'am," as she paused beside him at the curb.

"What is it, boy?"

"Is this the way to the South Side?"

She peered at him curiously for a moment, in a way that made him wish he had buttoned up his collar or looked more carefully behind his ears when he washed in the station that morning.

"Yes, it is," she said then. "Where do you want to go on the South Side, boy?"

He hadn't been thinking about a specific place, or at least not any specific place that he thought an elderly lady like this one would understand. Not any specific place like a place where musicians went. So her question threw him off. And her calling him "boy" like that scared him. He must have showed his fear, because the woman said quite sharply, "Where was it you were going, boy?"

She looked suspiciously at his sax case, too.

"Why, these people just told me the South Side and I just thought I could ask when I got there, ma'am."

It all came out in a rush and it sounded pretty lame even to him as he said it.

"Well, just keep on the way you're going. You'll get there," she said and moved on rather hastily. Joe thought she looked at him kind of funny and he was afraid she might say something to the next policeman she saw. So he said, "Thank you, ma'am. I'll do that," and forced himself to walk calmly to the next corner. Once there, he turned and ran, made another turn, and ran some more.

By this time, he was completely bewildered. But he was in a neighborhood that looked poorer, and that seemed right to him. So he kept on going. He was on a long street, both sides of which were lined with houses right next to each other, and all of them with little steps down to the sidewalk. Kids were playing in the street and they were Negro kids. He must be on the right track. There would be Negroes on the South Side, he was sure, and if he just followed one of them, he would come to someplace where there were musicians.

It was beginnning to get dark, but the street lights weren't on yet when Joe saw the tall, thin man come out of a house up ahead. He was carrying a small satchel and he was whistling. In the half-light, the satchel looked as if it might be a trumpet case, so Joe hurried to catch up with the man. He wouldn't be afraid to ask a trumpet player where to go. A trumpet player would know where musicians go in Chicago.

The man was starting to turn right at the next corner when Joe caught up with him.

"Hey, mister!"

He stopped and looked at Joe. It was a trumpet case he was carrying all right.

"Mister, I gotta find a guy named Jig Carson." Joe said the first thing that came into his head. "He's a saxophone player. Here. Someplace on the South Side."

"Carson?"

"Jig Carson. He's a saxophone player."

"You know where he works, kid?"

"Well, no. Not exactly. On the boats sometimes, I think."

"This is a long ways from the boats, kid."

The man's face was guarded, but not suspicious. He hitched the trumpet case higher under his arm and lit a cigarette, watching Joe's face.

"Tell you what you do, kid. This here's Indiana. Keep right along this street, on down past the *Defender*, till you hit the Vincennes. Thass a hotel. Night clerk there knows a lot of guys. Maybe he knows where this Carson hangs out. Ast him if maybe this Carson hangs out at the Sunset Cafe. Lots of guys does."

He had been right. A trumpet player would know. A trumpet player would help him. Give him names. Solid names like Sunset Cafe. Indiana. Vincennes. Name anchors in the Chicago sea of strangeness. Joe started to say, "Well, gee, thanks," when a streetcar rattled noisily to a stop in the next block.

"Thass my car!" said the trumpet player. "And me late awready. You do what I said, kid. So long."

He ran down the block and hopped the car as it lumbered awkwardly again into motion.

Joe had a destination now. If the guy wasn't kidding him he had, anyhow. And he did not think the guy was kidding him. He looked up at the next street sign and made out, with difficulty, the word Indiana. The guy was not kidding him. Joe shifted hands on the sax and started walking confidently towards the Vincennes. But just then, a car pulled up in the block ahead. Three cops got out and started looking up and down the street, walking towards him.

Terrified again, Joe turned a corner, ran until he saw the dim lights of a lunchwagon, and ducked in there. It was a dingy place, the lunchwagon, no wider than a good-sized streetcar. The stools whirled around like piano stools and the counter was covered with cracked and fly-spotted oilcloth that had once been white. The people in there were all Negroes. The man behind the counter brought him his coffee and doughnuts and called him "sir." Nobody looked as if they thought he had just run away from some cops. Nobody even paid any attention to him, except the counterman who had just called him "sir." In this nonchalant and reassuring atmosphere, Joe heard himself saying, "You know where the Sunset Cafe is, mister?" The man said, no, he didn't. He'd heard of it, he said, but he didn't know where it was. He called down the counter, "Any you guys know where the Sunset Cafe is?" They didn't know either.

"Well, thanks," Joe said, and went on eating. In a little while, he would go and ask the night clerk at the Vincennes where the Sunset Cafe was.

When he left, the street lights were on, and the streets looked strange again, under the lights. He was not sure now which way lay the safe name anchors of Indiana and Vincennes. He began to walk up one block and down another, looking, hoping he was not getting too far away from where

he had met the trumpet man. Indiana Street seemed to have disappeared altogether. But he was not afraid of the dark the way he was afraid of cops and people who looked at him suspiciously in the daytime. The dark brought the night, a friendly time, a time when musicians worked. It was night-time now. And some place near here, where he had seen a real musician, there would be music. He would listen and he would hear it and in that way he would find them. It was time to start listening now.

A couple of times, on dark and nameless streets, he did hear bursts of music, but he couldn't find the doors they came from. All the doors were closed and dark on the streets. Once he heard a piano coming from a narrow, dimly-lighted saloon kind of place. The piano reminded him of Mame and he went in past the glass door to sit down for a minute and listen to the fat Negro who was playing it.

"How old are you, kid?" the man behind the counter said.

"Uh . . . eighteen," Joe said, his voice thick now with fatigue.

The man looked at him sharply, then shrugged.

"We don't sell no near beer to no minors," he said, and went away.

Joe got up and went away, too. He didn't go far because his feet were stumbling by themselves and he didn't trust them. The street he was on now was lined with store fronts, all dark. Their narrow, oblong entrances looked to Joe like little rooms. He stepped into one of them and sat down. He could listen sitting down. But he fell asleep immediately, with his head and body leaning against his propped-up sax case. He fell asleep and he dreamed that he was wandering endlessly among so many people that he couldn't turn in any direction without stepping on a foot or a hand or a head. The people shouted all the time, not words but one long sustained roar. He kept walking, though, and suddenly Cozy and Pug were walking with him and they were shouting, too, but their shouting came out like music—like the kind



of music Joe Geddes was listening for, here in the strange and frightening Chicago streets, the kind of music that would tell him he was home.

The music in the dream grew very loud. It awakened Joe Geddes and it was not dream music. It was real music. It was some place on this street. Joe rubbed his eyes and raised his head. The street light on the corner threw a murky yellow circle across the pavement. Two men rounded the corner, into the circle of light. Their teeth flashed in their black faces. They wore no coats or hats and they were in a hurry. They were laughing and one of them had a trumpet case under his arm. They moved out of the circle of the light and into the deserted street to a store front opposite Joe's.

The one with the trumpet case knocked delicately on the door. He knocked six times, in groups of two, with an accent on the second, fourth, and sixth knock. Joe caught the rhythm distinctly. *Tock-tock tock-tock tock-tock*. When the door opened, a sudden blare of music shot into the deserted street like a discharge from a gun. The two men pushed their way inside and the door closed, leaving the street dark and deserted again.

This was the place, then, the place he'd been walking and listening for. This was the music that had been in his dream and it was no dream music. It was real, and it came from that place across the street. He had walked all day and at night he had listened and he had found it. He felt rested now, if a little cramped. He had no idea how long he'd slept. He'd had no idea of time all day. He crossed the street to the door on which you knocked six times. He hiked his sax case up in front of him with one hand and knocked with the other.

In a minute, a man opened the door, a Negro with a long, thin nose and a hunched back. He saw the sax and moved aside and Joe walked in. It was a place for musicians, all right. He walked through a dim passage and into the room

where the music was. The music burst in his face like a sudden light. Joe stood his sax case up in a corner and leaned on it. His weariness began to leave him, scooped up and thrown away in the bright ladles of brass and wood and ivory and cowhide music. A cornet writhed like a silver snake in the meshes of the rhythm. A clarinet seethed upwards in a series of bright sparks.

It wasn't a very big room, but it was so crowded that the sides seemed to bulge with people and smoke and music. Up towards the front, where the band was, a few couples who seemed to be standing up, swaying, were actually trying to dance on a floor the size of a good-sized double bed. They weren't trying very hard, though. What body could move with the surge and intensity of that music? Joe saw the drummer rise in his seat, extend his arms at both sides so that the sticks made pointers to the infinite, and shout "Play that thing!" They were into the last chorus of *Dipper Mouth Blues*. A tangled skein of noise to the unhearing, the unfeeling, the untroubled, it was to Joe Geddes a known pillow on which to lay his head. Home was Joe Geddes.

In the middle of the last chorus, the hunchback looked right at him and said, "Yes! Yes!" and smiled. Joe smiled back and said, "Yes, *sir*!" He was considering asking the hunchback for a cigarette or maybe even a bottle, because everybody else seemed to have one or the other and Joe was afraid he might look queer. Somebody might think he didn't belong there and ask him to leave. And so, turning toward the hunchback, he didn't notice the girl when she came toward him.

"Hello, Little Gate," the girl said.

Joe looked around sharply, at the broad face, the short black hair brushed back from the wide forehead, at the mouth that was folded softly and surely into a fullness that was a little too much. He didn't remember the face, but something about the voice, a husky vibrancy that didn't seem quite decent for a girl's voice, pawed at his memory. Like a

lick he'd heard somewhere, but just once so he couldn't put together all the notes.

"Aren't you the boy played sax with Frank Linder one night last summer in Muscatine?"

Then he remembered. Frank's cousin from Chicago. Sure he remembered. And he sure was glad to see her right now. Or anybody.

"Gee, h'lo," he said. "Sure, I'm the one."

"I'm Irene Jaynes, Frank's cousin."

"I know. Gee, h'lo. What're you doing here?"

"Oh, I go where musicians go. What are you doing here?"

"I go where musicians go, too."

They both laughed at that. Then they stood there smiling at each other.

"How's Frank?" she said, after a minute of smiling.

"Oh, Frank? Oh, he's fine."

"Did he come with you? He's been threatening to come up to Chicago."

"Oh? No, he didn't come with me. No, Frank didn't come with me."

He wished she'd stop asking him questions. He tried to think of something to say to stop her.

"You ran away," she said.

She was too quick for him. It wasn't natural for a girl to be that quick, to come right out and say things that way. A girl ought to give a fellow a chance to say things himself. And if he didn't have the guts to say them, she ought to let it go. Or manage to make him think he'd said them. That's the way his mother did with his father. And Rose. That's what Rose did. That was the thing he hated about women and girls. But it wasn't natural for it to be any other way. It made him uncertain and mad.

"I did not run away!"

He felt like a fool saying it. Looking the way he knew he must look, what was she supposed to think? That he was

just out for a casual stroll in Chicago's South Side? That he had just come up for the weekend—on a Monday?

"You just came up for the weekend and decided not to go back, I suppose."

Darn her anyhow. How did she know what he was thinking?

"I just—well, I just left, that's all."

"Oh, I see." She sounded as if she saw a whole lot too much. "Well, don't let it bother me. I don't care what you did or why."

He bet she didn't either. She wasn't just saying that.

"I see you still play sax. Why don't you come over to our table? There's a piano and a drummer over there. You remember the drummer. Danny Acosta, the boy was in Iowa City with Jig that night."

He followed her dumbly because he didn't know what else to do. He was mad, but he was excited, too. He had found them. He had walked all day and at night he had listened and he had found them.

The piano player at Irene's table was Bobby Freeman, a man no bigger than Irene herself, with black patent-leather hair and a toothbrush mustache over little pointed white teeth, the kind a chicken might have if a chicken had teeth. He was nervous and he smiled a lot. The drummer, as Irene had said, was Danny Acosta, a big man going slightly to fat so that his shoulders rolled up toward his neck and his arms rolled just above his wrists and his waist rolled in his belt.

They shook hands with Joe as if he were one of them, not as if he were just a skinny kid with no tie and a shadow of Rock Island soot under his chin. Then the band started again, playing something slow and mean. The leader, a fat, black man who played a trumpet with a rabbit's foot hanging from the valves, pushed a slight white man forward, a white man with black hair and mild blue pop eyes. He had a saxophone in his hands and he put it to his lips. A series of

lazy tones, like chiseled smoke, floated through the stifling little room. A cadenza. Then the band came in behind him, sure and steady and rocking. Feet began to tap. Bodies swayed. Worries, unhappiness, failure, all disappeared beyond the charmed circle of the blues and watched themselves come to a new kind of life in the sure, almost contemptuous expression of themselves in the music.

It was so good Joe thought he couldn't stand it. He looked at Bobby and Danny and Irene to see if they could stand it. They could stand it, all right. They listened with an aloof absorption. Their heads were averted and there was a silly grin on Bobby's face. When it was over, they passed a bottle around. It was gin and it tasted terrible, but Joe didn't mind. He took a long, quick one to quiet the excitement in his stomach.

In the talk that surged up, released by the end of the music, Irene said, "This is the boy I told you about once. The boy sat in with Jig one night in Iowa City. Remember, Danny? Let's let him sit in."

Bobby said, "Sure. Why not?"

Danny said, "Okay. Sure I remember him. He was okay."

The band had climbed down off the stand, leaving horns and drums and piano like inanimate, waiting people up there.

"Come on," said Irene.

They fought their way up front and started moving instruments out of their way. Danny sat down at the drums and experimented with the whisks. Bobby played several chords, full of strange, foreign notes.

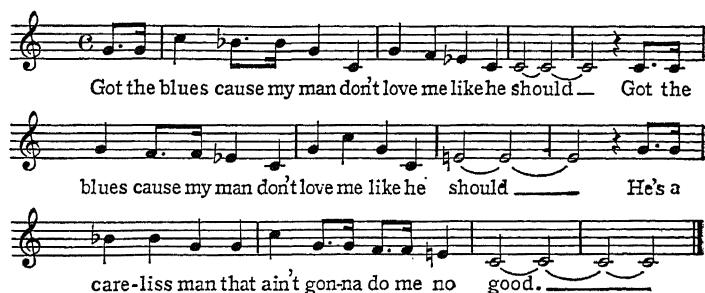
"Sing the blues, baby," Danny said to Irene in a sleepy voice.

"Okay," Irene said. "Where's your horn, Joe?"

He had followed them up front in a daze. He forgot about his horn altogether. Now he felt silly going back for it. He

opened the case on the floor, to keep the socks and shirts from showing, took out the horn, and closed the case carefully over his complete wardrobe.

They decided on the key. Then she began.



(This is a standard, typical blues tune used among American jazz musicians as a basis for improvisations.)

Joe noticed that Irene said "care-liss" the way Bessie Smith did on Mame's records. But he didn't have much time to notice her because he had to fill in the breaks with Bobby and Danny. They were right behind him and he was beginning to enjoy this. He wasn't scared the way he'd been scared in Iowa City. The talk quieted down and people were listening. A man in front of them, a tall man with deep lines carved in his long face, said "Tell 'em, Irene" in an easy, conversational voice, and grinned. When he grinned that way, all the lines deepened as if they had been gouged in with a knife.

"My Mamma told me get yourself a man with lots of money,  
My Mamma told me get yourself a man with lots of money,  
But money don't make no man care-liss like my honey.

"Money don't make no man worth his weight in gold,  
Money don't make no man worth his weight in gold,  
Money only makes his heart and his love grow awful cold."

He realized how good Irene was. He realized that she was improvising as she went along, the same way the rest of them were. Only she was doing it with her voice. She was playing her voice like an instrument. Sometimes it didn't sound like a voice at all. It pulled at her vocal cords, impatient with them that they weren't equal to what she was trying to do.

"Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot,  
Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot,  
And I wouldn't take gold money for what that man has got."

At the last line, Irene turned to Joe. He knew that meant he was to play. He waited till she'd finished, then breathed out one long note, followed by a hesitating, rising progression of tones as thick and shiny as hot tar. Irene sat down on the edge of the bandstand and Joe began to play.

This was a night he was going to remember because it was the night on which he first realized how easily he could say what he had to say, as if the notes were simple English monosyllables. "I hear the horn. Do you hear the horn? What does the horn say? It says I hold the gift of life in my mouth. Death is a bad man who dares not come near me when I play. I hear the horn. I hear the horn. I hear the horn."

He played four choruses and then he stopped. His lips were numb, and his throat felt as if it had been washed in sawdust. He had come back from some other world whose language he had been speaking without the impediment of words and he blinked and sighed a sigh that was almost a sob. Danny and Bobby took it out for him and finished off the chorus, with a coda that gave him back his sanity.

He put down the sax and looked at Irene and it came to

him with a kind of shock—the kind of shock you get when certainties take their rare place in your mind. Like when you first realize that all men are not like your father. Or that most people do not mean what they say in ordinary conversation. Or that seeds planted do not necessarily come to flower. He knew that he could play the saxophone. The realization excited him. He looked at Irene and thought, suddenly, that he could pick her up, as he did the saxophone, and play her. He knew she would respond, in much the same way the horn responded when he put it to his lips.

But all he said was “Whew!”

Danny and Bobby said “Nice going” and they all went back and sat down. Irene was sweating. Her face was shiny, with sweat and she was laughing, too.

“You’ve learned a lot this summer, haven’t you, Little Gate?” she said to Joe. He was pleased to have her call him “Little Gate.” He’d almost forgotten it by now, but he was pleased to hear it again.

She was explaining it to Bobby when the tall man with the deep lines carved in his face came over and joined them. He was Eddie Novik and he said, “What you drinking?”

When he tasted their gin, he screwed up his lined face till it looked like muddy water you’ve just thrown a pebble in. He said, “Jesus Christ!” He listened to Irene telling about “Little Gate” and because he was pleased he screwed up his face again till his eyes and his mouth were just three more lines in his lined face.

When Irene was through, she said a strange thing. She said, “Now you know he’s okay, one of you boys has got to get Joe a job.”

“Oh, say—” Joe began.

“How do you think you’re going to live in Chicago?”

He hadn’t thought yet so he had no answer.

“You belong to the union?” Eddie said.

“What’s that?”

“The musicians’ union.”



"No," said Joe.

"Well, you'll have to."

"We can get that straightened out tomorrow," Irene said. "Where's he going to sleep tonight?"

"I gotta room with a cot in it," Bobby said.

"Oh, gee," said Joe. "I wouldn't want to—"

But he didn't finish because everybody seemed surprised that he had bothered about it at all. A musician had to sleep somewhere, didn't he, they looked as if they were saying. Joe Geddes gulped because there was a thing in his throat dangerous to his dignity. Chicago wasn't mean. Chicago didn't roar that it was big and powerful and rich. Chicago was warm and kind and full of music. Chicago was that place he'd thought about where you sat down and didn't feel you had to be getting up pretty soon and going someplace else. He was only going to Bobby Freeman's room after a while to sleep. After a while when the rich surge of living was quieted down by physical exhaustion and you didn't mind going someplace else—to sleep.

But not yet. Don't let's go anywhere to sleep yet. It's only one o'clock and the sun of the music has just reached its high noon. Can't sleep now. Can't stop now.

Joe needn't have worried. Nobody had any idea of stopping now. The man with the mild blue pop eyes and the saxophone had come over to say hello. He was called Bud and pretty soon he got together a combination that included Joe and Eddie, who, it turned out, wrinkled up his face over a trumpet. A strong, squat Negro with eyeglasses had a trombone in his hands, blowing into it, softly. They got Danny to play drums.

They played classics like *Sensation* and *Fidgety Feet*, and *Muskrat Ramble*. They played together smoothly like a team. They had signals Joe soon got on to: two fingers held up meant take two choruses. A clenched fist in the air meant last chorus. A whispered "take it out" meant finish with a coda. Somewhere in the middle a guitar sat in and Joe

thought the music sounded much better. The guitar was a boy who looked no older than Joe, but who was. Under his straight blond hair, he had one of those slender, delicately-molded faces that never do seem to look any older. He was called Pee Wee.

Sometimes, between numbers, Joe looked back to where Irene Jaynes sat by herself. She knew better than to sing anything but the blues. You don't spoil a good instrumental ensemble with a vocal. She just sat there and listened, the way the rest did, with that aloof contempt to her body and her head averted as if she'd really rather be somewhere else. But you knew better by looking at her face which was set in concentration, and by the almost imperceptible movement of her feet which kept time gently if the music were fast, and by the almost imperceptible movement of her body, undulating with the rhythm from a center at the base of her spine, if the music were slow.

At three o'clock a cop pounded at the door and stuck his head in. Almost before he said, "Hey, you muggs," there was a murmur of protest from the people who remained. But most of them got up and started to go.

"He must be really having trouble sleeping tonight," said Bobby. "Let's go to Gus's."

They went to Gus's. At four o'clock, Gus threw them out. At five o'clock, they were riding along the lake front in Bud's old Studebaker. They'd dropped Danny somewhere, but they'd picked up Pee Wee, the guitar with the young face. They were playing *Sweet Sue* in a relaxed way—Eddie kneeling on the front seat with his trumpet pointed at the guitar who was sitting on the floor in the back. Joe sat with his back braced against Irene's on the back seat, not knowing whether he was sleepier or happier. If he ever stopped playing, he knew he'd fall asleep right then.

But they didn't stop playing. Sometimes Irene would come in lazily and they'd slip into stop time to let her sing. She didn't say words. She made sounds that could have come

out of a trombone. They all understood that she knew it was too bad there was no trombone, and they let her imitate one.

They were managing to get pretty good synchronization with the sound of the motor and when they went into *China Boy* Bud had to step on the gas to keep up. They must have been doing about sixty when they heard the motorcycle cop. It was a chase for a while, and they pulled over to the curb, but not until they had rounded out the current chorus of *China Boy*.

The officer was very mad and Bud automatically reached in his pocket for his license. He pulled out his union card instead, and this made the officer even madder.

"Musicians!" he said. "Where the hell you think you're going with that racket? I've a good mind to run you in!"

"Would it make you feel more kindly, officer, if I told you that my brother-in-law was Willard Sylvester, and that we're all friends of his?"

The officer looked at Irene, hard.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one," she smiled up at him. "My brother Will will vouch for every one of us."

"That the guy with the big band at the State-Lake?"

"The very same."

"You all friends of his?"

"All. And if you'll just tell me which station house to send them, I'll see that you get tickets for the show. Okay?"

That was how Irene got Joe out of his first scrape. They went home then. Bobby and Joe were the last ones dropped off. They got out at the corner of the street where Bobby had his room and they stopped a milk wagon. They went down the block to Bobby's rooming house, drinking the milk out of the bottle.

## Chapter VII

IRENE JAYNES WAS SEVENTEEN WHEN SHE and her sister Claire first met Willard Sylvester in the dim light of the Rialto's afternoon show.

The Rialto was no different from any other cheap nickelodeon on Chicago's South Side. Its tin roof and sides were just as grimy. It smelled just as strongly of peanuts and sweat and old pipes and stale air and dust. Its wooden seats were just as uncomfortable. But the Rialto had no tinny piano to accompany the six-shooting of Bill Hart and the perils of Pearl White. The Rialto had a band, usually three or four South Side kids who wanted the experience and who worked for very little. Mike Jaynes, who owned the Rialto, was an old vaudeville performer himself and he did not consider a piano adequate accompaniment for performers of any kind.

He was standing in the back of the house on this particular afternoon, watching the latest installment of "The Perils of Pauline," and listening to the loud, vigorous, lively, and thoroughly adequate music of his band. Surely Miss White herself would have been pleased with such noisily orchestrated accompaniment to danger. The installment came to an end—but not the music. The music continued, as loud, vigorous, and lively as before. But no longer adequate. The new picture on the screen had sadly begun the story of an old mother about to be sent to the poorhouse by her wicked son. Mike Jaynes could feel his blood pressure rising the way the doctor said was bad for him. He started down the aisle toward the front of the house, his square jaw very square and his broad face very red.

His daughter jumped up from her seat in the last row and went running down the aisle after him.

"I didn't see him, Irene. Oh, honest, I didn't *see* him!" she said in a loud whisper when she arrived down front, just behind her Dad.

Irene Jaynes looked up from her place on the steps that led to the Rialto's tiny stage.

"You make a fine lookout, I don't think, Claire!" she said bitterly.

The fat boy at the drums and the black-haired boy at the piano and the blond boy with the guitar looked around. The music stopped. Mike Jaynes grabbed his younger daughter by the wrist and pulled her to her feet.

"So this is the way you go to school, young lady! Running to cheap movies with a gang of cheap musicians! I'll see the school authorities. I'll—"

"Sit down in front!"

"Sit down you're rocking the boat!"

"Pipe down!"

The customers were getting annoyed.

"Come out of here, the two of you," Mike Jaynes started to say to his daughters when a smooth voice cut in over his.

"Start playing, boys," it instructed the band, who started playing. "And as for you, sir, you have a fine theater here, but you are creating an unseemly disturbance in it at the moment and I suggest that we discuss the business I came here to discuss with you outside in my car."

There was nothing Mike Jaynes could do about it. The man who owned the voice already had one arm around Claire and was propelling Mike with the other. Mike still held Irene by the wrist, and, in this uneasy formation, the four of them went up the aisle, out of the theater, and into the big, black limousine that stood incongruously at the curb outside the Rialto.

That was the way Claire and Irene first met Willard Sylvester, the popular Chicago bandleader. He was not exactly

a bandleader. He was a man who organized bands to which he gave his name and direction. He played little himself any more, though he was supposed to be an excellent musician and had studied abroad somewhere. Paris, Irene had heard. He had several bands and they made quite a lot of money for him.

He saved the Jaynes girls from their father's temper that afternoon, though he had actually come to the Rialto on business as he had said. He had come to the Rialto to hire Pee Wee, Mike's current guitar player.

"I have heard in many places around town about these young musicians of yours, sir," he said, when the Jaynes family was comfortably seated in his limousine and Mike was smoking an expensive Sylvester cigar. "It is my business to know about young musicians. If it were not that I have an adequate number of pianists and drummers, I might hire away your other two musicians also. And may yet. But the guitar I must have."

Mike Jaynes was too impressed to protest. Willard Sylvester was so excellently well-dressed that his rolypoly body seemed merely wide. His black hair was brushed smoothly up from his temples by an expert barber who knew how to make the most of beginning baldness. In his left eye, Sylvester wore a monocle and over his left arm he carried a hooked cane. Mike Jaynes had never seen such splendor in the Rialto.

"You see, Pop," Irene said from the back seat of Sylvester's limousine, "the boys are good. I told you they were good!"

"You shut up, young lady. Why do you have to be disgracing me all the time? Why can't you act like a lady? Like your sister. Like your sainted mother."

"Because I take after you, Pop!"

Mike raised his hand, then dropped it.

"What am I to do with two motherless young ones like these, Mr. Sylvester? I try to bring them up like ladies. I

put them in boarding school to keep them out of mischief—and what do they do? Run away to a cheap nickelodeon!”

“It’s just that he doesn’t think the Rialto is high-class enough for us, Mr. Sylvester,” Claire said. “But we like the Rialto. We think the Rialto is lovely!”

“If I may say so,” and the suave Mr. Sylvester did say so, “you could hardly ask for more than the loyalty your daughters give you, Mr. Jaynes. And, as they have further repaid you with beauty”—a bow for Claire—“and with spirit”—a bow for Irene—“you should, in my opinion, consider yourself a lucky man. I should consider myself lucky to have such a family.”

These last ten Sylvester words were prophetic though, as usual, there was nothing about them to trumpet prophecy. They were just ordinary words and they led to an ordinary and highly pleasant evening. For it developed that Willard Sylvester had seen Jaynes and Jaynes many times in vaudeville, had, indeed, played on bills with them and remembered very well the lovely, blonde Mrs. Jaynes whom Claire so startlingly resembled. Naturally, they all had to go to dinner with Mr. Sylvester and then to the theater where his most recently organized band was playing.

Now it may have been that Willard Sylvester did not remember the Jaynes and Jaynes act so well as he pretended. But he knew how to win an old man’s heart when it led to the young heart he wanted. The ten words of Sylvester, uttered so suavely on that first afternoon, became prophetic a year later, when Mike Jaynes died. Willard Sylvester married Claire Jaynes and considered himself lucky to have thus acquired Mike Jaynes’ family.

It would never have occurred to Claire not to have her sister live with them. She had taken care of Irene all the eleven years since their mother’s death. She was only two years older, but she had understood—and rightly—from the day of their bereavement, when she was nine and Irene seven, that her young sister could do with some looking after.

"You couldn't have married a man that would make me happier, Claire!" was her reward when she and Sylvester got back from their honeymoon. "I've been to a band rehearsal every day you were gone!"

"It is perfectly clear that that is the only reason your sister did me the honor of marrying me—to make you happy," Sylvester said, removing his monocle and bowing in Irene's direction. Then he looked into his wife's eyes and she smiled into his, and it was still more clear that Willard and Claire Sylvester knew that his words were a lie.

Irene worked in Sylvester's office enough to earn her living, and she developed and blossomed in her new life. She left school, of which she felt she had had plenty, and she devoted herself to music, of which she had never had enough. She got to know musicians, all the musicians she wanted. She could go to any of Sylvester's rehearsals, she could go out with any of Sylvester's musicians. She became known all over town as Will Sylvester's kid sister and she was as safe running around to joints and jam sessions as she ever had been at her boarding school. There were few musicians in town who would not see that Irene Jaynes got safely home when she was ready to go. The thing was that she knew musicians too well to be romantic about them.

There had been, of course, the inevitable trombone player. She met him the first summer she lived with the Sylvesters. She grew thin and moody and took to crying in bed at night. Claire and Sylvester talked it over with her.

"Honey, he's a real chiseler," Claire said. "You know yourself that he didn't show up for a week when Will sent him on that theater date to St. Louis."

"He is also an extremely bad trombone player," said Sylvester. "I should think your critical judgment would get the better of your emotions in a case like this. How can you be in love with a trombone player who cannot even play the trombone?"

"I don't know," Irene said weakly. "I just don't know



what it is. He stands there, the big stiff, and I just melt. He stands there, playing terrible trombone, just like you say, and I just melt."

Willard Sylvester looked carefully at his elaborate wrist-watch, through his bright monocle. They had finished dinner and it was nearly time for him to go to the theater.

"Well, Claire, my lovely, I suppose you had better take her aside and tell her what it is, poor baby, since I believe she really does not know."

What Claire told Irene when she took her aside made pretty clear distinctions between love and sex, stressing the values of each—separately, and combined. It was not a woman-to-woman talk; it was the talk of a woman born, to one who would have to find her way to being a woman.

A month later Irene was blithe again and Danny Acosta was dropping by to pick her up to take her to a session on the South Side. Or Bobby Freeman was. Or she'd meet Pee Wee after he got through on one of Sylvester's jobs.

"I'm glad it's over, Claire," she said earnestly one morning after her release from romance. "I'm honestly glad it's over."

She had wandered into Claire's room with her toothbrush in her hand and she was making noises like a clarinet on the toothbrush before she spoke. Claire was having breakfast in bed, cool and lovely in an ice-blue bed jacket.

"How do you know it's over, honey?"

"Well, he bores me, that's all. He just talks and talks and he has this conviction that if he drinks enough he'll be able to play like J. C. Higginbotham. He'll never be able to play like J. C. Higginbotham!"

"Who," asked Claire, "is J. C. Higginbotham?"

"Who is J. C. Higginbotham? Just about the best trombone player there is, that's all. Honestly, Claire, for a musician's wife, you certainly don't know much about music. Well, I mean, for a bandleader's wife."

Irene's crowd never referred to Willard Sylvester as a "musician."

"I don't think Will married me for my knowledge of music, honey."

"You needn't sound so smug about it."

"Did I? I didn't mean to. I only meant to sound happy about it."

"You are happy, too, aren't you, Claire? With Will, I mean. After—let's see—after nearly a whole year."

"I'm very, very happy with Will, honey."

"And yet, he really isn't a musician. I mean, not what I call a musician. It's—I don't know—it's so easy for him. It's so settled for him. The music never seems to get *to* him, I mean. There are so many other things for him besides the music."

"Like me, Irene?"

"I didn't mean that, Claire!" Irene rushed over and hugged her sister, ice-blue bed jacket, breakfast tray, and all. Claire expertly moved the tray out of danger, and put her arms warmly around Irene.

"I think you probably did mean that, Irene. But what's wrong about it? One day you'll want it that way, too, and you'll get it. It will be a little harder for you, but you'll get it."

She kissed her sister gravely in the middle of her wide forehead. Then she gave her a little push off the bed.

"Whatever am I talking about? You better be getting down to the office. Will said he wanted you to go along with him to hear some piano player this afternoon. You coming home for dinner?"

Irene rescued her toothbrush which had fallen behind the bed in her typhoon of sisterly affection.

"Uh-huh," she said, her voice muffled behind the bed-board. "But we're going jamming after. Danny and Bobby and Joe and me."

"Joe? Joe is new, isn't he?"

"Joe is that kid from Muscatine, you know, the one I told you about that plays such wonderful sax, the one we ran into one night about six weeks ago, the one that ran away

from home, I'm perfectly sure, though he'd die before he'd admit it. I must write to Frank sometime and find out for sure."

"The one you call that outlandish name?"

"Little Gate? What's outlandish about Little Gate? Oh, well, you wouldn't get it. Anyhow, I told the boys to help this kid and Danny says he's doing pretty good now. Hey! You know what's a funny thing now I think about it?"

"No. What's a funny thing now you think about it?"

"The night we ran into Joe was the very night I decided I'd had plenty of the trombone player. Nothing sexy, you understand, but I sure get excited about the way Joe Geddes plays the saxophone."

"You know what's an interesting thing to me, Irene, now I think about it?"

"No. What's an interesting thing to you now you think about it?"

"You never refer to your trombone player by name. You never did."

"You say the darndest things for a sister, Claire!"

When Irene and Bobby and Danny arrived at Gus's that night, Joe Geddes was already there, looking strained in a tux that belonged to Eddie Novik.

"Oh, cripes!" Bobby said. "It looks worse than I thought."

"It got me the job, though," said Joe.

"Good boy." Bobby went on up to the piano. It was a quiet session in Gus's back room tonight. A lot of the regulars were out of town on jobs, and the rest of them were only playing when the spirit moved them. Bobby was idly jamming with Danny and a trumpet player named Jess with whom he'd been having a running argument for weeks about the right tempo in which to play *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*. They were trying it now in several different tempos.

"What was the job, Joe?"

"Club on the West Side. Geez, I was scared when they asked me how old I was. I told them twenty-one and they let it go all right."

"This your first steady job?"

"Well, it'll be my first steady job if it lasts longer than my last steady job which lasted two weeks."

They both laughed at that, and the laughter gave Joe the courage to say, "You know, I want to thank you for introducing me to these guys. Bobby and Danny and Pee Wee and all. I would sure have been lost if I hadn't got to know these guys."

"Oh, well, if it hadn't been me, it would have been somebody else."

"No, I don't think so. I don't think anybody else would have bothered. After all, I was just a corny kid from the corn state. I don't think anybody else would have bothered to help me."

"That's silly." Irene was a little embarrassed by his earnest gratitude, so she talked more vehemently than she meant to. "Why, anybody could see how good you are. Could hear, I mean. You'd just have to play for somebody and they'd help you. Even Will, probably."

"You're the one that did, though. And I want you to know I'm grateful. I'm going to be all right now."

"That's okay, Joe."

"I never had a chance to tell you about it before. I just thought I'd mention it now when there aren't so many people around."

"Okay, Joe."

They talked in these commonplaces because they couldn't, either of them, talk the way they felt in words. She couldn't say, for instance, that she was drawn to him by an excitement about his talent. And also by his obvious need for someone to look after him. She had been amused by him at first, because he had the ingratiating helplessness of a young animal—an awkward, not a cute one. An animal that was try-

ing to do a simple thing like walking and was extremely pleased with itself. But you could see how badly it was moving and toward what dangers; it could not. You had to reach out and help. You did not reach out and help people indiscriminately, but you reached out and helped musicians. Particularly when they were real musicians. You felt strongly about real musicians. It was nothing personal. It was something musical.

Irene could spot a real musician very quickly. He had a quality of losing himself in the music. Whether he was mad or sick or drunk or hopeless, the music made him walk like a man. It took charge of him and gave him a life for the moment apart from himself. He lost his own life—which was often no very great shakes anyhow—and found another. This is a phenomenon, of course, that appears in most artists, in many fields—building, science, teaching, love, cooking, sports. But Irene only understood it in musicians.

She saw it in Joe Geddes now, when they called to him from the piano and he went up to sit in. She watched him playing, and she thought how little it mattered that his tux was too small for him. All it mattered to him was that the sleeves were tight and got in his way so he took off the coat. The realistic part of her mind told her she had seldom seen a funnier sight than Joe Geddes' long legs sticking out of Eddie Novik's too-short trousers. But she did not see that when Joe played. Irene did not see a man like Joe Geddes. She heard him. And already she heard him talking with a saxophone accent.

She could not have said any of this to him in words. And he? Could he have told her, in words, what he was learning in Chicago? He told her that he was learning to play the clarinet; it made jobs easier to get, he told her, if you could double on clarinet. He told her that he was learning to play stock arrangements of pop tunes and also learning to hate them. That he had a job where he had to bleat his way through waltzes. That he wouldn't see her for a while

because he had a job on an excursion boat. That he had a job in an amusement park. Or a summer resort on the lake. Both of them enjoyed it very much the night he told her that he had a job in a Hawaiian band. The club owner had hired him by mistake and then didn't have the heart to fire him for nearly six months.

What he couldn't tell her was what it meant to him, learning in Chicago, nights, after the jobs were over. Maybe what he was learning wasn't important to anybody but the men who were learning it. Maybe it wasn't even any good to them, as people for the most part reckon good. In those days, when they were learning, they didn't care. They were making a new kind of music. They were making it because it did not exist anyplace else. The music to be learned in the music schools, as they saw it, had been written down by men who did not live the kind of lives they lived. It was music that did not say that life was harsh and ugly and riotous and hilarious and sad with a great unfairness in any way that they could understand. Most of what was written down in the music schools did not even, technically, show what could be done with a steady four-four beat, as they were learning to show it. To show into what tortuous paths a single bar could be twisted and still emerge into the pattern of the whole when you wanted it to. The men Joe knew in Chicago were dedicated to that discovery without any more formality than the urge to explore, to express what they felt, and to be mighty excited about what they found out.

Theirs was, to many people, a scandalous idea: to wit, that good, honest music was to be made from the materials at hand in the unsheltered, unhallowed lives of men who played in dance halls or speakeasies or saloons. Or worse. It was somehow indecent, their unstated idea, like the notion that the acts of children had sexual significance. You could explain their kind of music in the Negroes, of course, as being primitive and orgiastic and all right for them because, after all, Negroes were like children, weren't they,

really, and lived lives that you wouldn't want to live anyhow and wasn't it nice they could bring out their natural jungle rhythms in this way. But for white men to get musical ideas of that sort—well, really!

Joe and his friends never thought about the Negroes as different at all. Only as better. They all knew the Negroes were the best. Why else do you think they hung around the Dreamland and the Sunset or any place in Chicago where they could hear Johnny Dodds or Jimmy Noone or J. C. Higginbotham? Why do you think Joe threw his whole week's pay on the floor the first night he heard Bessie Smith herself, not a record, sing? Why, to keep her singing, of course. When you hear somebody singing like Bessie, you don't want it to stop. You can't be careful about these things. It's worth a week's pay just to sink yourself in it.

It was a lovely life, those first three years in Chicago that Joe and Irene knew each other. It was disciplined by nothing but the music, lived in crowded, smoky rooms under inadequate light bulbs, fed on lunchcounter food and bootleg liquor and cigarettes, clothed in shabby serge suits and shabbier tuxedos that frequently belonged to somebody else. Joe Geddes loved it, but he could not have expressed his feelings about it to Irene Jaynes. Nor she to him.

Luckily for them, they didn't have to. They had a steady, sure, and practical means of communication in the music. They were friends, very good friends. He liked her as he had never liked another girl because it seemed to him that she knew what he was after even better than he knew himself. And she did not want him to have it in order to get something out of it herself. Like Rose. Though he seldom thought of Rose now. He wondered occasionally, in idle moments before falling asleep—in those moments when hosts of remembered things come back, unsummoned, and parade before your sleepless mind—if Rose had been telling him the truth about the baby. He was inclined to think that she had not. But even when he was inclined to think she had, he could

not imagine Rose unable to take care of herself. Whatever it is that makes a man feel he must protect a woman was completely absent from Joe's make-up—perhaps because usually he was the one who needed protection. Perhaps also because he had never accepted the value of social structures as he knew them. Home, family, parents, school, women—they had never given him anything he wanted. All they did was stand in the way of what seemed to him a perfectly simple thing—playing the kind of music he liked. He never wrote his family and he never missed them. What was there to miss?

He got so he missed Irene, though. Not in any way he could express. Not in any way important enough to do anything about, like calling her up, for instance. Sometimes weeks went by without their even seeing each other. In some of those weeks he'd suddenly feel something was missing, that was all. He didn't show any interest in other girls, like the blondes in the first lines of choruses in night clubs where he played. Or the telephone operators in hotels where he lived. Not that any of these would have harmed him. But they would have confused him and wasted his time and taught him nothing. He waited around till he saw Irene again. With Irene, no time was wasted and they learned together. Her criticism was based, he knew, not on how she felt about him, but on how he played. In giving it, in talking with him at all, she was very offhand and casual and friendly. Maybe too offhand and casual and friendly. The four of them—Danny and Bobby and Joe and Irene—traveled around Chicago like a mixed quartet. As often as not, it was Danny or Bobby who picked Irene up and took her home again. It was hardly what you'd call romantic.

Then Bobby started disappearing. He started disappearing because he unaccountably found himself always wanting to go over to a club called the Spades to pick up a hatcheck girl named Elaine Romaine and take her home. The three of them made a lot of fun of Bobby. But he still disappeared.



He'd go along with them happily until 4:00 A.M. or so and then he'd say "Goodnight" and go to get Elaine.

They accepted it after a while and, on that bitter cold night in January, when they had been living their lovely musicians' life together as a mixed quartet for three years, they let him go, almost without a single wisecrack. They'd been doing the rounds till nearly four, and had stopped off at an all-night diner for breakfast. All five of them—Eddie Novik was along this night, too—ordered ham and eggs and coffee, and sat sleepily around a porcelain-topped table without saying much. When their orders came, Bobby gulped his down, looked hastily at his watch, said "Goodnight," and left.

"By a curious coincidence," said Danny Acosta loudly, as Bobby dashed out the door, "Elaine Romaine gets through working at four-thirty."

"Romance has lifted its ugly head again," Irene said, but only for something to say. This thing with Bobby and Elaine had been going on too long. It wasn't a joke any more. It was serious.

"Nothing wrong with romance," Danny said.

"Only its place is in the home," said Joe.

"I ain't got no home," said Eddie. "Hotels ain't homes."

He was a little drunk and he put his head down on the table.

"Hotels are homes away from homes," mumbled Danny and put his head down on the table, too.

"Well," said Joe. "They must be getting old."

"Or else it's the weather," said Irene.

She and Joe finished their breakfasts. Then they pried Danny and Eddie to their feet and took them outside and dumped them into a passing cab.

"Here's the address," Joe told the cabby. "Leave them both at the same place. Hey, Irene, is there room at Eddie's hotel for both of them?"

"Well, really, Mr. Gee, how would I know?"

"Oh, that's right. We'll have to take a chance. I know the

night man at Eddie's hotel is a good friend of his, driver. He'll take care of them."

It was not quite dawn yet and the lights of the departing cab had a silver look against the white street. The snow that had fallen during the night was white pollen under their feet and the snow-emptied sky glowed with a pale luster over their heads. It was bitter cold and a hard wind was blowing.

"Geez! We probably should have taken that cab along with the guys."

"No, let's walk a while. My legs are paralyzed and my fanny aches from sitting so long."

"Okay."

Joe and Irene and the saxophone set out in the stinging wind.

"And besides, my lungs are so full of smoke from that last joint, I can hardly breathe. Why don't we stop sitting around all night in places where there's less air than the Black Hole of Calcutta?"

"What's that?"

"Some place in India where a lot of guys died because there was no air. It's history. Hey, we turn here, don't we?"

"I played in plenty Black Holes of Calcutta then. Yeah."

"What?"

They turned the corner and the wind caught them full in the face.

"I said I played—oh, let it go. That's a hell of a wind."

It was a wind that cut off your words from the tips of your lips and carried them away, howling.

"Hardly hear you. Hardly breathe, either."

"Take a deep one. Take a deep breath."

Irene took a deep breath.

"Ummmmmmmm. It's good. Clean and sharp and good."

"Feels like breathing ice to me."

"Anyhow it's breathing."

"What?"

"For Pete's sake," he started to say, but a sudden blast of wind yanked the words out of his mouth. He bent to protect himself and caught Irene around the waist to keep her from being swept away from him. It was the kind of wind that bent your body like rubber and tugged at your feet so they could hardly cling to the pavement.

"This is crazy," Joe said. He pulled her into the nearest doorway. "How the hell can we walk in this tornado? We should have taken that cab. Let's wait here for one anyhow. Can't navigate out there."

"You know how it is with cabs this hour of the night. We'll never get one."

"Oh, sure we will. Anyhow, we'll have to wait. We can't even walk in that wind."

"We may have to wait for years."

"Oh, well, we can grow old together."

They laughed at that, and their laughter was muted in the snow-muffled air. It had begun to snow again, blowing past them in white ribbons.

"Gee, it's quiet in here," Irene said, after a while.

"Yeah." He looked down at her face, just at the height of his shoulder. "Your nose is getting red," he said.

"That's a fine, romantic thing to say. And us alone together for the first time in our lives practically. And the last probably. What do you expect in this weather—peaches and cream noses?"

"It's a hell of a night," Joe said, setting down the sax and blowing on his hands.

"You lost your gloves again."

"Yeah. Damnedest thing about me and gloves."

"You haven't any more sense than a baby. No musicians have."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so. Here, let me rub your hands warm."

"Never mind."

"Don't be so stubborn. Give me here."

When she'd finished with his hands and they did actually feel warmer, she said, "There!" and let them go.

"How about yours?"

"What do you mean—mine?"

"You seem to have lost your gloves, too."

She giggled.

"You're so smart. You and your cracks about musicians. Here. Give me your hands to rub."

He took her hands in his and felt how firm and small they were in his big ones. They were good, capable-looking hands, with slightly enlarged joints and the muscle above the little finger hard and firm from playing the piano. He liked the feel of that hard, firm muscle in his hands. The snow fell past their doorway like a curtain, shutting them in. The snow made a soundless noise just past his shoulders and he felt very close to Irene, holding her hands there inside the soundless noise, inside the soundless curtain of snow. He felt very close to Irene, and he dropped her hands and put his hands on her shoulders. Her shoulders were small and firm, too, ridiculous and little there below his chest. He put his arms all the way around her and held her to him and felt her arms and her back and her small, firm thighs.

"You're so neat and nice," he said. "Like a little silver horn."

This was poetic of him, there inside the curtain of the snow, and they were both surprised.

He held her away from him for a moment and looked into her rather startled face. Her eyes were open very wide because she had felt herself yearn toward him when he put his hands on her thighs and this was a new sensation for her to feel for Joe Geddes and it surprised her.

"Funny I never seemed to really notice you before," he said. "Always so damned many people around."

Then he kissed her. It was a good, firm, clinging kiss and it had nothing hysterical or premeditated about it. Irene kissed him back the same way. She stood up on her toes

to meet his kiss and she felt his arms go round her strong and sure. She put her own arms around his waist. After a moment, she drew away and stood on her feet again. But she left her arms around his waist.

"Well!" she said.

She leaned against him and tried to remember that this was the awkward kid she had been running around with these last three years. She could not remember with his arm holding her against him. She could hardly remember who she was herself and she was having difficulty breathing.

"I want you like hell," he said.

"Are you sure," she said, breathlessly, "that we aren't living in a fool's paradise?"

"Don't make jokes. This is serious."

"Yes, I know."

"Come here, dopey."

"I can't come any more here than I am."

He bent and kissed her again. There was a gentleness in this kiss and, when he had released her lips, he laid his cheek against hers and held her more closely, rocking her quietly in his arms.

When a cab did come, finally, he picked her up and carried her out to it, then went back to get his sax. They drove to his hotel.

It was not anything like the way it had been with Rose. He was sure of himself and not showing off. He was proud and pleased that she wanted it to be this way. Afterwards, he felt still closer to her, warm to her, and delighted with her. He was not able to say much about it, nor was she. They smoked and laughed and did not talk and were happy. They slept till dinner time, went and ate, and separated.

He said, "You'll be my girl now, won't you, Irene?" and she said, "Yes, Joe. I'll be your girl."

Then he went to work and played some pretty joyous horn, missing several cues and starting *Dinah* in E Flat instead of C.

Irene went home. Willard had already left for the theater and Claire was pouring herself a second cup of coffee from a silver urn.

"Had dinner, baby?"

"Uh-huh."

"Want some coffee?"

"All right. Sure, I'll have some coffee with you."

"You're looking very special tonight. Feeling very special?"

"Joe Geddes and I are sweethearts, Claire."

"He's the saxophone player, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's that one."

The coffee was poured now and they took first, solemn sips, and looked at each other across the rims of their cups, steadily.

"And it isn't like that time with the trombone player?"

"No, Claire. It isn't like that at all."

## Chapter VIII

AS SOON AS SHE SAW HIM, IRENE SAID,  
"Who is Rose Dubrowsky?"

He leaned down to kiss her, as he always did when she picked him up like this after the job, but she turned her head away. "Why aren't you up at my place, getting ready for the party?" he said to her left ear.

"Maybe you didn't hear me, Joe. I said 'Who is Rose Dubrowsky?'"

"I heard you. I just thought you might rather hear about the job Jake may get the Hot Five at the Four Square Club."

"I'd rather hear about Rose Dubrowsky."

"Where'd you even hear the name?"

"Never mind that now. I want to hear about it from you."

"Okay. I know when I'm licked. Let's go in here. This calls for a drink."

They went into a little place near the dance hall where Joe was currently working. She sat down across the table from him and didn't say anything, but her eyes were bright and hard. She waited while he gave an order to the sleepy waiter. She was not the kind of girl who tap-tap-tapped with her fingers while waiting. She just sat quietly looking at him with her eyes bright and hard. He knew he was going to have to talk. He wished it could be somewhere else, someplace where he could hold her in his arms and not have to say it to her set face across a dirty table in a speakeasy. But his place would be full of people tonight and the way she looked, he knew she wouldn't wait till afterwards. This was the way it was. So he began to talk. It didn't take long to give her the bare details.

"You did run away then. It was that night we bumped into you, that first night, wasn't it, that you had just run away?"

"Yeah. I guess you could call it that."

"That's what it was, Joe. It was a weak-spined, run-out thing to do."

"Listen, Irene. She probably framed me. She probably just said that about the baby."

"You ought to have your head cracked open," Irene said. "Look, Joe, I don't care how you felt about her or what she did or what you did. Even if you loved her, but said it was over, I'd believe you. But just to walk out like that. Without even knowing. Without calling her on it. Without even trying to find out for sure. You're a yellow-bellied quitter, Joe Geddes."

"For Christ's sake, you sound as if you wanted me to marry the girl!"

"Look, Sir Galahad, don't get dramatic on me. It's a little late now to talk about what I want you to do. I'm talking about what you're like to pull a thing like that. I don't know whether I like somebody who pulls a thing like that."

He had to tell her more than the bare details then. And, because he had to make her understand, he became quite eloquent for Joe Geddes. He had to make her see how it is to live someplace where the music is hated and suspected and sneered at. Where you're not allowed to practice and there's nobody to play with all night and you're not allowed to see people like Cozy and Pug and Mame—not for any reason except that they're colored.

"What's the matter with colored people?" Irene said. "They're the best."

"I know, but not in Muscatine, Ia. Listen, Irene, Rose was nice to me. We'd listen to Mame playing and I liked having her there okay. But not to marry. Not for her to get something out of me. I'd never had the nerve to come to Chicago if she'd tricked me into marrying her. Just



stayed and worked in the tomato factory all my life and then where would I be? Listen, Irene, try to see how it was, won't you? How would you have liked it?"

"Not much, I guess," Irene said. She was trying to understand in her mind what it had been like. A little like being at school and wanting to be at the Rialto, probably. And no Willard Sylvester to come along and rescue you. That kind of life seemed a long time ago now, but she was trying to understand in her mind how it had been with Joe, in that time when the music must have been pushing him from the inside till the pressure got so great he would have burst if he couldn't let it out. And then, when it was threatened by Rose, by a trap . . . yes, she thought she could understand how he might have acted like that.

"I'm sorry I called you those names," she said, after a while. "But I still think it was a weak-kneed thing to do."

"I guess maybe it was. If you think I should do something about it now, Irene . . ."

"What can you do about it now?"

"Well, maybe I could try to find out where she is, maybe Frank might know. Now you see how I am. All this time and I never even wrote to Frank."

"Never mind, Joe. I'm his cousin and I never write to him either. That's how I am, too. Claire writes to Aunt Mildred sometimes, I think, so we sort of hold the family together. However, it just so happens that Frank is in Chicago at the moment."

"Frank's in Chicago?"

"Apparently he had to go to summer school this summer and, as a reward—for what, I don't know—talked Uncle Frank into letting him come up to Chicago for a few days."

"Well, for Pete's sake, why didn't you bring him along?"

"For one thing, after I talked to him on the phone this afternoon, I decided it might be better if I saw you alone first."

"Listen, did he—"

"Don't get excited, Joe. He didn't say a thing against you. As a matter of fact, he paid off your saxophone for you, in case you ever worried about it."

"Oh, Jesus! I guess I forgot about it. I always meant to pay old Masterman some day. But I never worried about it. Say, that was swell of Frank. Remind me to give him the money."

"It wasn't Frank's fault about the other, Joe. I just wormed it out of him. You can understand my interest, I suppose? He wasn't very clear about the details." She was beginning to sound like the old, easy-going Irene again and her eyes were no longer bright and hard. "By the way, Frank said your mother called him up once to find out if he knew where you were."

"Oh, God! Good thing he didn't then."

"He also said that Rose Dubrowsky ran off with some guy that traveled for the Heinz Company that next summer."

"No baby?"

"No baby. I don't know why I'm telling you all this stuff though. You'll see Frank in a little while and he can tell you. But about the other. I wanted to hear it straight from you. Thanks, Joe. . . . Say, we ought to be getting over to your place."

"Aw, Bobby and Elaine will take care of things. They take care of everything in sight now they're married. Wait a minute . . . come on over here, honey."

She hesitated a minute, then she got up and moved over to his side of the table. He put his arm around her, drawing her up close to him.

"I guess I was a weak sister, running out like that, all right."

"It was a rotten thing to do, Joe."

"Yeah, I guess it was."

"I wonder if you're really changed any, if you'd do the same thing again."

He tightened his arm around her.

"If you're thinking about us, I wouldn't, if that's what you mean. I mean it would make a difference if it was you. It would seem like something that belonged to me. I mean, if you said you were going to have a baby—God forbid!—I'd believe you for sure in the first place, and I'd be damned sure it was mine in the second place."

"And you'd be damned right in the third place!"

"But then, with Rose, I didn't even know if it was true or if there really was a kid or if it belonged to me and, in the first place, I never wanted any of it anyhow. Honest, Irene, it's different now. Honey, it *is*!"

Irene put her cheek next to Joe's and rubbed. "You could use a shave," she said. Her anger was gone now and she was glad she'd made him talk about it. "Yes, Joe, I think it's different now. Come on, let's go to the party!"

The party was at Joe's place, a furnished apartment into which he had moved a club-sized piano, painted white, with casters like the one Earl Hines used, and a phonograph. Irene spent a lot of time there, but she lived at home, as usual. She and Joe didn't depend on each other so they had to be together all the time. They didn't even particularly want to be together all the time. They certainly didn't want a home and a lot of possessions they'd be responsible for and have to take care of. What they wanted mostly was a small but good jump band and a place to play. They got the band and called it Irene's Hot Five. Sylvester had always objected to her singing with bands and she respected his wishes about it. It was nothing she was in the least ambitious about. But singing with a little band of her own was different. Just Joe and Bobby and Danny and Eddie. The fifth man was a trombone player named Tony Jacoby. He was a St. Louis boy they met one night at Gus's. He had black hair and a square face and sleepy eyes and he was easily the handsomest one in the quintet. They called him Jake and he rounded out the Hot Five. When they played the blues, Irene sang. They were good and knew it, but that

didn't get them any jobs. Since '29, a lot of places had folded. The depression wasn't skipping the music business.

"You said something about Jake getting a job for the Hot Five," Irene said on their way to his place.

"I'll tell you about it later. We gotta stop here and get cigarettes."

Elaine Romaine, now Freeman, met them at the door of Joe's place.

"Check your hat, sir?" she said, looking pretty with her red hair all fluffed around her face and smiling her hatcheck girl smile.

"Haven't got a hat, *Mrs. Freeman*," Joe said, "and don't look so happy about it. It's indecent!" He piled all the cigarettes in her hands.

"My cousin Frank get here, Elaine?"

"Hey—Joe!"

Frank was there all right, all nervous energy and unruly hair. He made his jerky way over to them and grabbed Joe by the hands.

"My God!" he said. "Look at you! And I have to go to college!"

"Jesus! It seems like a long time, Frank."

"It *is* a long time. I suppose Irene here was giving you some of the dope. Well, listen, I'll tell you the rest. Come on, I'm too excited to stand still!"

They walked around the two rooms, bumping into people, refilling their glasses every so often, stopping every once in a while to introduce Frank to somebody, and Frank told Joe what he could remember of that September, four years ago, when Joe ran away. They came to light at last on a window-sill.

"Jesus!" Joe said. "I sure left a mess behind me."

"Aw, it wasn't worth much of anything really. Look at you now! Do I envy you, Joe! College stinks!"

"That's tough. Well—hey, what ever happened to Old Dill?"

"He's dead. They found him out on that road past the tomato plant. Frozen to death, looked like. He was probably drunk."

"Yeah," said Joe. "He probably was. And I never paid him back his seven bucks. . . ."

Just then Irene came up with Jake.

"Of course you're the out-o-town visitor and all, Frank," Irene said, "but do you have to hog the host?"

"Besides, we got other visitors coming," Jake said. "Eddie's bringing them. From New York."

"New York! Gee!" Frank Linder said. "Who?"

"Some guys from Fletcher Henderson's band. They're in town."

"Henderson!"

Frank's eyes got big and he let his hair jag down over his eyes without even bothering to push it back. Joe was impressed, too. He'd only heard Henderson's band on records. "Hope Eddie'll bring Coleman Hawkins," Joe said. "How soon you suppose they can make it?"

When they came, Joe was standing with a drink in one hand and the other arm around Irene. He recognized Henderson and Hawkins from their pictures and was just starting forward to welcome them when he saw the other two—the one with the tremendous shoulders and short, wide face; the other skinny and so tall he walked with a forward curve like a rocker. The skinny one was the color of shiny bitter chocolate; the other was the color of pale cinnamon. "Hiya, Joey," the bitter chocolate one said.

Joe dropped his drink with a wet clatter on the floor and threw both his arms around Cozy Wilson somewhere in the neighborhood of Cozy's waist which was about as high as Joe could reach just then. He was unable to say a word and he could feel tears stinging in his eyes. To cover his emotion, he began to talk very fast.

"You old river boat rat, you! How come you never looked me up in all this time before? And Pug—you old no-good!

You mean to tell me you were never in town before when I was? I don't believe it! Have a drink! I had a drink. What the hell ever happened to it? Jesus, is it good to see you two. Irene! Come here, Irene! Come here and meet Cozy and Pug!"

Irene came over when Joe called her. She had moved away when she saw what was happening, moved back with the others who stood watching, aware that this was no ordinary reunion. The room glowed with warmth and friendship and good feeling. You could have hung up the grins for Jack o' Lanterns.

"Whatcha been doing?"

"Oh, around. Kansas City. St. Louis. Didn't get into Chicago much. Henderson now . . ."

"You playing with him steady?"

"Just started. Just got in town. Been in N-you York."

"Just heard you were around tonight."

"How come you left Ioway?"

"Got in kind of a jam. I—"

"Good place for it."

"Hear you're in the money, Joey."

"Not so you could notice it. I'm working, though. All your doing, man. . . ."

"Aw, get lost!"

"How's Mame?"

"Okay. 'Cept for the rheumatism. Legs, though. Not her hands."

"Geez! Mame!"

"We work steady, she's comin' in to Chicago."

"Can I get a word in here edgewise to say that I've heard a lot about you two from Joe?"

"Don't let him kid you none, ma'am."

"He says you taught him all he knows."

"Aw, he was good before he was born."

"Listen, remember that night in Iowa City?"

"You sure have growed up, Joey."

"Good Jesus Christ—what a night!"

They wore themselves out with this Chicago style conversation. They had to have a drink and stretch out on the floor to calm down. Somebody said, "What're we waiting for?" and that was the cue for a session.

It was the first time Joe had heard Coleman Hawkins, too, except on records. The way Hawkins played opened up a place in Joe's mind and his ears that had been waiting to be opened up. He heard a new kind of tone. If he had known how to express it, he'd have said it was a tone with two dimensions. Or even three. It seemed as though he could smell and taste that tone of Hawkins' as well as hear it. Hawkins played like a man without illusions, who was under no compulsion to try to make things seem better than they were. Listening to the men from Henderson's band, Joe saw how the music could have beauty as well as excitement. It was after this night that he began to think more about his own tone. He began to practice again, and he began to think how much more could be done with that rich fullness.

After everybody had gone, he lay a long time with his head across Irene's belly. "Jesus!" he'd say at intervals, remembering the music. Sometimes he'd laugh out loud, remembering, and Irene would laugh, too, and make his head move up and down with her belly.

"You know what?" she said.

"Sure. What?"

"I want you to buy me a couple of those Henderson arrangements."

"What for? You couldn't read them."

"I know. But I'd just like to see what it looks like, all that music put down on paper."

"You don't write down on paper what those guys play."

"I know. But as much as he does write down."

"We'd never get enough guys together at one time to play it."

"Maybe not. But I'd just like to sit and look at the music."

"You're crazy!"

"Probably. But it would be fun just to sit and look at it."

"All right. All right. Quit talking like a broken record. What would you like me to buy you?"

"Oh, get him to do *King Porter Stomp*. And *Blue Skies*."

"Okay. You can frame them and hang them on the wall."

"No. I'd just like to—"

"I know. I know. You'd just like to sit and look at them."

He turned over on his stomach and kissed her.

"What a dope you are, darling!"

"What a darling you are, dope!"

"Darling—dope—dope—darling—so long as you got your health!"

"Let's go to sleep, shall we?"

"Okay. Oh, wait a minute. I said I'd tell you about that job. Jake said tonight looks like we're really in."

"What job?"

"I started to tell you about it before, but no. You only wanted to hear about Dubrowsky then. Now maybe I won't tell you!"

"Joe! Don't be that way. Come on. What job?"

"Steady at the Four Square Club. Or as steady as you can be at a speak."

"Me, too?"

"Darling, no! It's a tough speak."

"Irene's Hot Five. Minus Irene. Well, okay, Joe. You happy about it?"

"Sure. Why not? Eighty-eight bucks a week. No interference. Play whatever we like. Just so we keep playing. Every night. At least, till something happens. And it will. Something always happens in a tough speak!"



## Chapter IX

AFTER THEIR FIRST FOUR WEEKS IN THE Four Square, Joe decided he had been wrong about tough speaks. Nothing happened. Every night from nine till four, he and Bobby and Danny and Eddie and Jake just sat there and played—played what they liked how they liked. Nobody paid much attention to them. People didn't come to the Four Square to listen to music. The music just came with the place, and as long as it kept going, few critical ears were turned in their direction. They played with a feeling for ensemble that held together like a handful of steel filings and a magnet. They improvised indefinitely. They would get started on a number like *Royal Garden Blues*, say, and every time they got to what was the logical end, somebody got a new idea and off they'd go again.

Then one night, in their fifth week, a guy started shooting. He shot out all the plaster roses in the wreath on the ceiling of the main dining room where they played. Their ability to improvise indefinitely came in handy. They played twenty-nine choruses of *Tiger Rag*. For about twenty-five minutes, it was difficult to tell which was louder—the shooting or the music. Then the guy shot himself and rolled all the way down the stairs outside the dining room.

Joe knew then that he had been right about tough speaks. But the Hot Five wasn't giving up any job that paid eighty-eight dollars a week on account of a little shooting which didn't happen regularly or even often. Besides, the Four Square was the fanciest joint they had ever played in. It had once been a private house and still had ceiling-high mirrors and two-foot baseboards. The dining-room ceiling had fancy plaster work—a sort of wreath held up by Cupids—from

which a glass chandelier hung. That is, it had had plaster roses until the night the guy shot them all out. He didn't improve the cut glass chandelier, either. But Charley Orabello, the guy who ran the Four Square, had the ceiling patched up. The dining room also had red plush chairs with gilt legs and a red plush carpet and tables with white tablecloths. Each table had a pink lamp with gold fringe on it. If anybody big like Al Capone, say, came in, all the doors were double-locked and guarded and nobody was allowed in or out. When Capone came in, he gave each of the boys in the band twenty-five dollars for playing a request, usually some sentimental thing he liked. *Carnival of Venice*, maybe. Joe always associated *Carnival of Venice* with Al Capone.

"Al Capone may think he's a big, tough guy," Charley often said, "but he's nothing alongside of my brother Leo."

Charley Orabello was a nervous little Italian, with a twitch in one eye and a body built like a cowbell with the wide part at the shoulders. He walked bent over as the result of getting mixed up in the middle of a shooting one night. Charley wasn't tough himself, he was only harassed. He's been in this business so long, he thought of it as legitimate. He liked to join the boys out in the kitchen when things were quiet upstairs where the tables were.

"We ever going to see that brother of yours?" Joe asked Charley one night when the Hot Five had been at the Four Square for nearly a year, not counting times the place had been temporarily closed up. The boys were all out in the kitchen this night, and the cook had fried eggs for them and mixed hot toddy, with genuine Jamaica rum just run in from Canada. Charley wasn't eating. Just drinking straight gin.

"Sure. You'll see him. He comes in about once a year. His territory's out in Cicero, but he pays a family call about once a year."

"What's he like?" Eddie wanted to know.

"Aw, he's a gorilla with a monkey brain. But then he don't

have to have a brain. He's got a smart girl. Good-looking, too. Smart and good-looking dames is poison in this business. Leo better watch out for himself, I keep telling him."

"Dames are all alike," Jake mumbled sleepily with his mouth full of egg. "None of them are smart *and* good-looking. What's the use of being both?"

"This one is, just the same. Christ, the questions she can ask and look at you with those big, beautiful eyes. She's got more influence over the boys than Leo has, too, but he's too dumb to see it. Don't do no good to keep telling him to watch out for her. Only makes him sore. He's crazy for her."

"You afraid of Leo, Charley?" Bobby was, just hearing about him.

"Sure I'm afraid of him. Everybody's afraid of him. But I'm more afraid of her. That's because I'm smarter than everybody."

"Leo owns this joint, don't he, Charley?"

Charley's eye twitched very fast. "Hell, no," he said. "What give you that idea?"

"That's what I thought," Joe said.

"Now listen, kid. I don't know why I shoot my mouth off in front of you kids. . . ."

"Because you know we don't give a damn, Charley. When we gonna see this Leo character?"

"*And* his moll. It's the moll I want to see," Jake said.

"Rose. Her name's Rose. Rose Morgan, she calls herself. You'll see them."

They did, too. Nobody could have missed them.

First the food was sent in, by truck, from Leo's Cicero establishment. Squabs. Oysters. Ice cream. Salads. Sausages. Cheeses. Wines. Champagne—two cases. Leo was afraid to eat any food he had not personally seen killed, cooked, bottled, or at least prepared and tasted in front of his eyes, Charley said. Leo's own cook came with the food. Also Leo's own waiters.

Just before nine o'clock a special table was brought, set

up on a sort of dais in the middle of the main room, laid with a gold lamé cloth, and set with gold service plates and special silverware initialed with ruby "L's." At nine-fifteen the florist arrived and covered the center of the table and the frames of the chairs with orchids. At nine-thirty, four heavy characters, dressed in black, came in, searched the place, and took their places at the doors. They kept their hands in their pockets.

"Doesn't a hundred-piece band go with this routine?" Joe asked Charley.

"Naw. Once musicians are frisked—you were, weren't you?"

"Yeah, we were."

"Leo ain't scared of musicians. Well, boys, now you're gonna see it. My Christmas present from my brother Leo."

At nine-forty-five, Leo and his girl arrived. Leo wore a sealskin coat, lined with squirrel, and a wide, pale gray sombrero. You couldn't tell about his brain, but he certainly looked like a gorilla, except that he walked quickly, with little steps, and kept turning his big head from side to side. His girl wore mink and black velvet and pearls and her face, under the black hair, looked as if it had been put on with house paint.

Danny said, "Here come the elephants!"

Jake whistled low when he saw the girl and said, "Shut my eyes!"

Eddie did a doubletake, then wrinkled up his face and shook his head violently so that his jowls shivered like a bull pup's.

Joe didn't say anything. But his mind said something to him in a flash and it was. "She made it to Chicago all right." His mind told him, too, that there was nothing surprising about it, nothing surprising at all. Morgan or Dubrowsky, Rose would get what she went after. He wondered briefly who Morgan had been and how she had framed him. Then he remembered, unhappily, that she hadn't got what she wanted

out of Geddes. He hoped to God she figured that that was baby stuff now and not what she had wanted anyhow. It would be awkward, he thought, if she held it against him. But that was silly. Good God! It was more than five years ago. Just the same, he kept his back turned to the room. He would rather she didn't recognize him at all so he gave the boys the downbeat on *Muskrat Ramble*, and kept his back turned to her. While he played, he stood facing the boys, the way a symphony orchestra conductor does.

He needn't have worried. She didn't even look in the direction of the band. It was plain to see that Rose paid scant attention to the help around a place. She paid attention to Leo. Charley came in and had a drink with them and Leo gave him a big leather box with something shiny in it. But Charley didn't look very happy. Of course, Leo didn't look happy, either. Nor Rose. Nobody looked happy. The place was empty, since nobody was allowed in. The empty tables and the empty staircase and the four heavy characters in black at the doors were not the kind of decorations to give a place a happy look. The boys in the band weren't any happier than anybody else, but they went right on playing one set after another the way they always did.

Toward midnight, Leo sent one of his waiters up with a hundred-dollar bill and a request for the band to play the quartet from *Rigoletto*. The request stopped them cold.

"Must be one of them Wop tunes," Jake said.

"It's an opera," said Danny.

"Sure," said Bobby. "Used to be a vaudeville act at the Chicago had words to it. 'Oh, yes, we have no bananas now' are the words. No kidding."

"We used to play the damned thing in high school," Joe said. "But I can't remember how the hell it went."

"We gotta play it," Eddie said. "I have a feeling the gorilla has the Black Brigade along with him to take care of people who don't do what the gorilla wants."

The gorilla was already making rumbling noises. Then he

was talking, the first words he'd said out loud all evening.

"For a hundred dollars I want the music I want!" he said.

He turned his heavy body in his chair and looked towards the bandstand. Rose turned and looked, too, to see these men who were not doing what Leo had paid them to do. She looked at them all in turn, slowly. She stopped looking when she got to Joe. He was too busy with *Rigoletto* by this time to notice that she had let her gaze come to rest upon him. It took her a minute to establish him in time and place in her mind. When she did, she went on looking at him, speculatively. In her eyes that looked slate blue in the daytime but very dark at night, there was both amusement and contempt. But there was also annoyance because this was the skinny body that had escaped her, the thin mouth that had laughed at her, the slender hands that had thrust her away. Her eyes looked very dark indeed tonight.

"Music!" Leo shouted. "Music!"

She let him shout. She could have quieted him, but she let him shout. She had turned her head away from the band now and was looking out towards the door. Charley came running out of the kitchen.

"Sweet Mother of God!" Charley said. "What's that son-of-a-bitch up to now? Climbing out of his Cicero gutter and hollering and carrying on and ruining respectable people's places of business!"

"Hey, Charley!" Joe grabbed at him as he passed the bandstand. "How the hell does the quartet from *Rigoletto* go? Just hum the first bar. We'll get it."

But Charley had already run past and was going toward Leo, talking fast in Italian. Three of the heavy characters at the door moved toward Leo, too. Rose stood up, and then the lights went out and shots were fired. Not even bothering with a downbeat, Joe went into *Muskrat Ramble* again. It was the only thing he could think of. Vaguely, under the music, he heard a scuffle outside on the stairs, then another

shot, then footsteps down the stairs. Then the street door opened and slammed shut. He heard Rose scream once and could just make out Charley swearing in Italian. Pretty soon the Italian swearing went past the bandstand, and when Charley returned from the kitchen, he had two waiters with him and half a dozen candles.

"Looks like a mine disaster," said Danny, looking up from his drums.

"See how important it is to be able to play without notes," Eddie remarked, with a nod to Joe to take a chorus.

Leo was the dead one. He lay across his chair with the gold lamé tablecloth clutched in his hand and food and dishes all over him. The orchids from the back of his chair stood up in an arch across his middle. One end of the wire by which they were attached had come loose as he fell. Rose Dubrowsky stood beside him. She was not frightened and there were no tears in her eyes. In the candlelight, her body was only a shadow, but her thick white throat was held high and taut. If you touched her throat, a sound like a plucked string would have come out. Her throat looked like that.

"Looks like the sleepwalking scene from *Lady Macbeth*," said Bobby, playing stop time.

They kept on playing for half an hour before the lights went on. By that time, everything had been cleared away. No body. No gold cloth. No orchids. No characters in black. No Rose. The whole thing might have been a movie. The boys stopped playing then and had a stiff drink.

"We did better tonight on *Muskrat Ramble* than we did that other night on *Tiger Rag*," Bobby said. "Thirty-six choruses. I counted them."

Charley handed the note to Joe, who was draining his second stiff Scotch. Now that it was all over, he was scared. His hands were shaking. Charley was scared, too. Charley's eye was twitching so fast you could almost hear it.

"Rose said to give you this," Charley said. "She shouldn't have gone back out to Cicero by herself. Funny, though. She

didn't even seem scared. She's got guts, that Rose. Hard as a rock."

"Listen, Charley, there must be some mistake," Joe said, feeling sure there was no mistake, but trying to convince himself.

"You guys better go home now. Wait till you hear from me before you come back. Get your money from the cook. It's all counted out for you. Even if he is my own brother, he ain't got no right to make me such trouble. Probably have to close up the place for good. Well, g'night, boys."

Charley walked crookedly toward the kitchen.

"Merry Christmas," he said over his shoulder, without turning around.

Joe was afraid of the note. He stood holding it in his shaking hands till Danny said, "Maybe it's got another hundred in it to play the funeral march."

"Probably the dame wanting the first hundred back for not getting that Wop tune," Jake said.

"Open it, for Christ's sake," said Bobby. "If you can stop shaking long enough. Somebody tell him it's all over—even the shooting."

Joe tore open the envelope.

"Dear Joey," he read. "Imagine seeing you here. . . ."

He folded the sheet of paper and put it back in the envelope.

"It's personal," he said.

"Personal? Well, looka the kind of company our Joey keeps!" Bobby said. "Personal from who? The ghost of the gorilla?"

"Shut up, you guys. I mean it's private and it's trouble and it don't need to bother you any. Go on home. I'll call you."

He picked up his saxophone and its case and went out to call Irene.



## Chapter X

THEY READ THE NOTE TOGETHER. WHEN Joe phoned, Claire said Irene had already gone over to his place, so he went there and they read the note together. It was written in pencil, written hastily on a blank sheet of paper. The handwriting was angular, very steady and black and ominous looking.

"Dear Joey," it read. "Imagine seeing you here. In a tough speak. It looks like you didn't do so well for yourself in Chicago. I did fine. A lot of things have happened since the tomato factory and a lot of things are different now. It will take me a few days to get things quieted down, but I always did have more pull with the boys than Leo did and by Monday everything will be okay. I want you to come out to Cicero and play at a place I'm going to open up as soon as I get organized. Just you. We can pick up some others. Musicians are a dime a dozen in this town. I want to have you working for me. Like old times. I'll send a car for you when I'm ready and I advise you not to try anything funny. Like trying to doublecross your old girlfriend Rose."

Irene shook her head quickly from side to side.

"Next week East Lynne," she said.

"It's not funny."

"I didn't mean it to be funny."

"Well, don't make gags then."

"I'm sorry, Joe. I only said that because it seems so awful, I had to say something. Do you suppose she bumped him off herself?"

"I don't know. Like I told you, I didn't really notice anything much. I was too nervous."

"I don't wonder. . . ."

"What's she think she's gonna do—make a harem out of me? I know a guy played trumpet worked out in one of those Cicero places once. They knocked his teeth out. He hasn't played trumpet since."

"Oh, Joe!"

He got up and started to walk up and down the room. He stopped at the little piano and played the first notes of *Bugle Call Rag*. It sounded silly. Duh de *duh* duh *duh* de *duh* . . . duh de *duh* duh *duh* de *duh*. . .

"Maybe you could hide out, Joe?"

"Oh, the hell with it, no. Where?" He sat down on the piano bench and put his head on the top of the piano.

"It sounds like a moving picture."

"You don't get your real teeth knocked out in a moving picture."

"You can't blame her for wanting to get even with you, Joe."

"Listen, no woman like that ever had a kid of mine!"

"She'd say something about it if there was one probably."

"Sure. She'd use that instead of this gangster stuff. If there was one."

"Oh, Joe, what a jam!"

She went over to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"She can't do this to you, Joe. She can't order you around like one of her gang."

"Yeah, that's what all the beer boys thought. Then some night somebody sticks a gun in them or just messes them up like that trumpet player."

"All right. You'll have to get out of town then. Now. Tonight. We'll go home and tell Will."

"Will? What's he got to do with it?"

"Look, Joe. This may work. Will has three bands in New York now. You could leave tomorrow, before anybody finds out. Or before she could think you'd leave. We'll get out of here now—before she puts somebody on the house to watch you. Joe! Did anybody follow you here?"

"I don't think so. I didn't notice. I didn't think of it."

Irene went quickly to the window and looked down into the street. There was a man standing across the street, looking up towards their window. She drew back.

"This happens to other people, Joe, not us."

"Only this time, it's us."

"Look, get some things together. Or no. Don't bother. Just take your sax and clarinet. We'll go out through the cellar. Don't turn off the lights. Oh, Joe, I'm scared. Put your arms around me."

He did.

"I'm scared, too," he said. "But you seem to be doing all right."

"Somebody has to, darling. Come on. We'll go home now."

They left the lights on. They turned on the radio and left it playing. Then they went down the back way, out through the basement door, and through back alleys. They walked twelve blocks before they dared come out on the street and get a cab.

Willard and Claire Sylvester were drinking beer in the living room. They showed no surprise when Joe and Irene walked in.

"Joe's got to get out of town, Will," Irene said right away. "There are some gangsters on his trail and he's got to get out of town. You've got to give him a job in New York so he can get out of here."

"Have a glass of beer, dear," Claire said, "and then tell us about it. Sit down, Joe, won't you?"

When Irene told them about it, Will Sylvester made no comment. He got up and went out to the kitchen for another bottle of beer.

When he came back, he settled down in his armchair, replaced his monocle, and said, "I am very happy to meet you at last, Joe Geddes. I knew that sooner or later you would be around to see me. All you hot men get around to me sooner or later. I regret, naturally, that the circumstances are un-

fortunate. You had to get in a bad jam first. Chicago, I have found, is a good town for bad jams."

"Look, Will, never mind playing God. We're scared! Claire, make him stop playing God!"

"Irene, my child," Sylvester said, "may I say that it would be worth it, no matter how bad it is, to find something that really scares you."

He drained his tall, thin beer glass.

"Don't be silly," he said then. "Joe Geddes isn't the first musician in Chicago to get mixed up with gangsters and get out of it alive. Tell him to play."

Joe was scared for good then. Play now? For this fat little man with the thinning black hair and that silly monocle? For this man who, Joe remembered in sudden panic, had gone to the Paris Conservatory of Music, they said? Maybe he *was* commercial. Maybe he did own bands like stables of racehorses. He knew music. All the guys admitted that. And Joe was scared and he couldn't have told you for a minute whether you played the saxophone with your teeth or your toenails.

"And never mind making excuses about your reed," Sylvester said.

"I wasn't going to—"

"Play me the blues."

That was a good choice. For one thing, Joe didn't think he could have thought fast enough to play anything else. And he sure didn't feel like playing anything else. Irene slipped over to the piano and played some chords. Joe started to play.

Claire Sylvester curled up in a corner of the big divan and listened, blonde and serene and beautiful. Occasionally Sylvester himself would get up and go to the kitchen for more beer. Once he came back to the door before he had had a chance to replenish his glass and stood listening, empty glass in hand. His monocle dropped from his eye and he let it hang on its black ribbon. Then he nodded and disappeared again.

When Joe stopped playing, six empty bottles stood on the arm of Sylvester's chair. He got up and went again to the kitchen. He brought back two more. One he offered to Joe, who stood dazedly by the piano, played dry, letting the sax hang by its strap around his neck.

"Very good," Sylvester said, his eyes meeting Joe's over the glass. "I do not know how you do it. I have played in American towns where the people have never before seen a live musician, except, possibly, the church organist. In the whole town, nothing but a wheezy church organ, wheezily played. You probably come from such a town. And yet, somehow you spring up, American kids, making music nobody understands on instruments nobody taught you how to play."

"Somebody taught me," Joe started to say, but Sylvester paid no attention.

"You must play, and so—you play. I do not know how you do it. Of course, when it comes right down to it, I do not care how you do it, just so you do it."

Somewhere in the quiet night, a clock struck three little chimes like the clink of ice in a glass.

Sylvester finished his glass of beer.

"I suppose you double on clarinet?"

"Huh?"

"Clarinet. I suppose you also play the clarinet?"

"A little."

"A little, he says. But of course he plays the clarinet. Nobody ever taught him to play that either. But he plays it."

"Say, listen—"

"He probably just picked up the clarinet and played *Clarinet Marmalade* right away. They don't have to learn to walk, these kids. Get right up and fly."

"That's not so. I practiced hard." 4

"Don't try to explain it, Joe Geddes. If you could explain it, you would be teaching it, not playing it."

"You'll give him a job, though, won't you, Will?" Irene

said. "You'll put him on a train right away, won't you? I can handle the details from the office tomorrow."

"Most certainly I will give him a job. Take the eight o'clock train tomorrow morning for New York. Irene will tell you where to go and who to see."

He got up and started out of the room.

"Come to bed, Claire. Oh, by the way, Geddes, will a hundred a week be all right? They are always telling me how artistic and uncommercial these jazz musicians are, but I notice they always want plenty of money from me."

"A hundred will be fine, Will," Irene said.

Then he was gone and Claire came over and put her hands on Joe's shoulders. He was afraid she was going to kiss him, but she only raised a hand and smoothed back his damp hair.

"Thank you, Joe Geddes," Claire said. "I haven't seen Will so moved in a long time by the music. Don't disappoint him. And take good care of Irene."

"I'm not going, Claire. It's Joe that's in the jam."

"Oh? Well, take good care of yourself then, Joe. Good-night."

And she, too, was gone, closing the living-room door behind her.

Joe reached for Irene.

"It's going to be all right, honey. It's going to be all right!"

She kissed him several times, little quick kisses of relief, then one good, long one.

"You were wonderful tonight, Joe. You even got through to Will who keeps trying to forget all the time about the music, he's so busy selling it."

"Say, he's got a lot of nerve, making me audition!"

"That was no audition, darling. That was your new employer getting you out of a jam."

"The hell with my employer. That was my girl getting me out of a jam. Jesus, honey, what would I ever do without you?"

He started to kiss her, then he remembered.

"Hey! What's this I hear about you not going to New York? I didn't think right away tomorrow, of course, but listen, honey, that goes about me not being able to get along without you."

"I know. I mean I like to think I know."

"You know, all right."

He looked down into her face, holding up her chin so he could get a good look. Her face looked relieved, yes, not worried as it had been an hour ago. But there was an odd, vacant look on it, too.

"Listen," he said, "you're not going to let me go to New York by myself?"

"Joe, what we have to think about now is getting you out of town."

"We already did that. But you'll come later. Okay?"

"I don't know, Joe."

"You're scared, honey! I honestly believe you're still scared."

"I am, Joe. You know how you have a dream and it scares you and you wake yourself up—and then you're *really* scared. Now we've got it arranged, I guess I feel like I'm coming out of that dream. I'm *really* scared."

"Scared of New York? I'm not scared of New York. It's not much bigger than Chicago, after all."

"It is bigger. And I think I'm scared of what a town like New York does to people. I think I half hope you'll come back when this blows over."

"Maybe I will. But, if I don't, you'll come, won't you, honey?"

"I don't know."

"Listen, it isn't as if it was in another part of the world. It's in the same country, for Pete's sake. I won't want to be by myself in New York. I'll want you there."

"Can't I come and visit you and see if I like it?"

"That's a hell of a way for a fellow's girl to talk. Other fellows' girls don't talk like that. 'I'll see if I like it!'"

"I guess I'm not like other fellows' girls."

He lifted her over into his lap.

"You're right, honey, you're not. You're like my girl. And when I send for you to come, you'll come. And you'll like it!"

"Maybe."

"Hell, honey, don't you love me?"

After Joe asked the question, neither of them said anything for a minute. They had never really talked about loving each other. There had seemed no need. They were happy together. They had the music and each other and there had never been any need for articulate assurances about loving.

"That's a funny question to ask," Irene said at last.

"Well, don't you?"

"I honestly don't know, Joe. I must, I guess, because I never feel any interest in anybody else—in a personal way, I mean—and I like to be with you and when I'm away from you, I always think that it will be all right soon because I'll be with you again. Is that love?"

"Well, sure. Sure that's love."

But he said it without conviction because he had never thought about it even that much and had no definitions of his own to offer.

"Well, then, I guess I love you."

"You'll come, then, when I send for you?"

"Joe, I don't know."

She put her head down on his shoulder and, in a minute, he looked down suspiciously.

"You're not crying, are you?"

"No, I'm not crying." She looked up at him and managed a bleak little smile. "I just feel all mixed up. Everything's all mixed up by things we didn't have anything to do with. I hate Rose Dubrowsky!"

"Well, I don't exactly feel like a mother to her myself. But I don't want to make things any tougher for you, honey, than they are. You do it the way you want to."



"I'll come to see you if you don't come back. I'd love to come to see you in New York! If we could only tell from here what's going to happen. Joe, can't we let it wait till we see what's going to happen?"

"I guess so. Sure, honey. I guess it can wait."

He caught the eight o'clock train for New York that morning, feeling a little silly in the daylight about running away from a lady gangster's note.

## Chapter XI

"Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should,  
Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should,  
He's a care-liss man that ain't gonna do me no good."

JOE GEDDES TOOK THE NEEDLE OFF THE record. Then he took the record off the machine. Then he broke the record across his knee. It was a good record. It was a fine record, full of guts and music. *Irene's Blues*. Irene and Her Hot Five, the label read. Irene and— it read on the half that looked up at him from the floor.

He put another record on the machine. *Fife and Ten*, by Johnny Carlyle's Orchestra. Johnny Carlyle sang the vocal.

"This little fife went to battle,  
Back in seventy-six;  
This little fife went to battle,  
And learned a lot of brand new tricks. . . ."

Then Johnny Carlyle's Number One Fife played *Stars and Stripes Forever*.

"This little fife sold peanuts,  
Right on old Broadway,  
This little fife sold peanuts,  
And whistled the livelong day. . . ."

And Johnny Carlyle's Number Two Fife obliged with a version of *The Peanut Vendor*.

"This little fife got lonesome,  
Went looking for love, and then,  
This little fife wasn't lonesome,  
For it landed in the fife and ten. . . ."

And now Johnny Carlyle's Number Three Fife led the orchestra into *I Found a Million Dollar Baby in the Five and Ten Cent Store*.

Side-splitting, huh? But Joe Geddes didn't laugh. Johnny Carlyle's Number Three Fife didn't laugh. The kid from Chicago, he was. He could play anything, they said. He was very busy these days, playing anything. No time to play something. Play anything. Joe let the record run and went over to the telephone.

"Room service? Send up another Calvert's, will you. Geddes. 702."

"What'd you do with the Calvert's I sent up before? You must be having a big party, Mr. Geddes!" Room Service snickered.

"Listen, I didn't ask your opinion of my social life. What d'ya think it is—still Prohibition? You buy the stuff right out in the open now, you know. Like oranges. Send it up, sister!"

"Okay, Mr. Geddes, if you say so. You don't have to get sore about it."

When the kid brought up the second bottle, Joe threw the first one in the wastebasket. It missed, and when he went over to pick it up with elaborate care, he stumbled over something on the floor. Irene and— He picked up the half a record and threw it violently at the wastebasket. Then he sat down weakly on the bed.

Okay. You don't have to get sore about it. What if she hasn't been in to see you for six months? She was busy, she said. "Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should." New York was too big, she said. So she'd come in and run right back again, to make good, honest records. "He's a care-liss man that ain't gonna do me no good. . . ." Okay. You don't have to get sore about it.

You used to play like that, too. Used to walk right up to the music and make it say uncle. No gags with cheap fifes. Just the music. Straight and clean and hot. You were easy-

going and happy in those days. You liked yourself then. You liked people. You used to laugh a lot. You used to have a piano on wheels. She used to play this piano. She'd play a chorus, then give the piano a push so it rolled over to Bobby. Then he'd play a chorus and give it a push back. Never miss a beat doing it. Fun, huh? Yeah, fun. Of course, the lady gangster shot up the piano, too, when she found you'd skipped. But she got shot up herself, later. So you were quits.

He spilled a little Calvert's on his lapel. Then he got up unsteadily and looked at himself in the mirror on the bathroom door. Blue pants. Not navy—blue. Royal blue. Orange pea jacket with a royal blue velvet collar. The uniform of Johnny Carlyle's Orchestra.

"God!" he said aloud. "I look like a doorman in hell."

He ripped off the jacket and the pants and flung them on the floor. The phonograph was still scratching at the end of *Fife and Ten*. Holding on to a chair, he lurched over, turned off the machine, and collapsed on the bed.

That's what people wanted to hear. *Fife and Ten*. Novelties. Every night, from nine o'clock till one, novelties. Hop up on the bandstand in your orange and blue uniform, oil up all your musical gadgets—the fife and the piccolo and the ocarina. Be funny with the gadgets. Be funny with the novelties. Never any different. Never any changes. Mustn't make any changes in the music, Geddes. It gets Mr. Carlyle all confused if you make any changes in the music. Burny, burny, Geddes. Get Mr. Carlyle confused and you'll get your salary check burned.

Fine thing, bands. Fine thing, the music business. That's the trouble with it. All business and no music. All business and no music makes Jack a dull boy. All business and no music makes Jack. Okay. So you're making jack. Hundred and fifty a week from Carlyle. Hundred from Sylvester wasn't enough for you. Not enough for the kid from Chicago who could play anything. He had to get more money from

Carlyle. And radio. Oh, yes, the radio. Play pretty music on the radio—all exactly alike and all of it stinks. And then the man from the advertising agency gets his feelings hurt because you give Toselli's *Serenade* a fine, wide vibrato—just for fun. The man from the advertising agency doesn't like any punk saxophone player doing that to Toselli's *Serenade*. The man from the advertising agency likes Toselli's *Serenade*. Don't you like Toselli's *Serenade*, Mr. Geddes? I think it stinks. Oh, you do, do you? What are things coming to when the guys that play the music have opinions about the music they're paid to play. That's revolution, that's what that is. You be careful now, Mr. Geddes, or you'll get fired off the advertising man's radio program. Hard to handle, that's what they're starting to call you, Geddes. That's the kind of reputation you're getting in the business, Geddes. You don't like the music you're paid to play so you're grouchy and touchy and smart aleck and hard to handle. You don't know how to get rid of it, so you go out and get plastered and throw your money around to impress show-girls that walk out on you when you get moody. Who's moody? Who's Geddes?

The phone rang.

"Joe? Joe, honey, we're having a party over here at Manny's. We want you to come over!"

"Who's this?"

"Why, Joe-eeee! Don't tell me you don't remember your little Coco?"

"Oh, sure. Sure I remember. Hiya, babe."

"Well, that's better. Come on over to Manny's. It's a wonderful party!"

"Tell you what I'll do, Coocoo . . ."

"Coco!"

"Oh, yes, Coco. Tell you what I'll do. I'll flip a coin. Heads I come. Tails I come. Okay?"

"Okay, sugar. I'll be wa-a-iting. . . ."

She hung up and Joe turned over and went to sleep.

Irene turned over, too, but she didn't go to sleep. She sat up and looked at a Chicago sky that was the usual dirty gray. This was getting monotonous. This was more early morning sky than she'd seen in quite some time. This was a great deal too much early morning sky to be seeing with such regularity. Once you'd seen that dirty gray Chicago sky, you'd seen it and it was getting very monotonous, waking up to see it like this every day in the uninteresting hours between 6 and 9 A.M. In the good old days, you slept peacefully through these dog hours, and woke up bright and lively around noon, when it was possible to face the day.

When it was possible to face some days anyhow. All those days last summer, for instance. They were a cinch to face. Swimming and lying in the sun all day, and singing with the Hot Five at that lake resort nights. *That* was fun. *That* was showing him you could get along okay by yourself. That was showing him you didn't need *him*. Of course, the clarinet on the job could have been better, and sometimes, right in the middle of a chorus, you'd hear a small ghost of a clarinet that had been better. Oh, for heaven's *sake*! Not that routine with missing Geddes again! Think what fun it was to be singing regularly—professionally—with your own Hot Five. Plump up the pillow and turn over again and try to find a length of sheet that isn't all wrinkled—and think hard about what fun it is to be singing with Irene's Hot Five.

"Heard anything from Joe lately, Irene?" Bobby would say.

"No, Bobby. You know he never writes. Don't write, telephone. That's Geddes."

"Yeah, only he don't telephone much either."

"Well, he was all right when I saw him in the beginning of the summer. Very successful in New York. Ve-ry successful."

"So I see by *Variety*. You took him the records?"

"Sure. I took him the records."

"He like them? Acourse, he could criticize the clarinet."

"He didn't criticize the clarinet. He liked them all right."

"Well, sure would be great to see him again. Hey! Why don't we all run in some excursion and see him?"

"That would be great! Yes, let's do that."

Only they never did. It was a little hard to get excited about riding an excursion train to New York to see a guy you never heard anything from. So they never did. They worked. In a club after the lake resort job. They made more records.

"Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot,  
Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot,  
And I wouldn't take gold money for what that man has got."

Get up and get a glass of water. Maybe phenobarbitol will do it. No phenobarbitol in the medicine cabinet. Oh, well . . . well, just what *had* he got? He was the gilt-edged kid, all right. You couldn't go any place in New York with him where somebody didn't know him and come up and say hello to him. People who knew him, but you didn't know them. Girls with loud voices and men with jobs to offer.

"Why, Joe-e-eeee! Where have you *been*?"

Then the loud voice would kiss him and leave lipstick on his jaw and rub off the lipstick with his neat handkerchief and stick the handkerchief back in his pocket with the lipstick showing. And he didn't bat her one. He didn't even say, "I been busy. My girl's in town." Oh, no! Not the gilt-edged kid. He said, "I been around. You're the one that hasn't been." And then he'd introduce her. "Miss Jaynes. Irene Jaynes from Chicago. Singer."

"Why don't you come into New York, Miss Jaynes? You don't want to stay in a hick town like Chicago all your life. Now, I've got a little club on the West Side . . ."

"Well, thanks. I don't know whether I'd like to work in New York or not. It's pretty big."

"Listen to that, guys! She thinks New York is pretty big!" That was a laugh to the gilt-edged kid's friends. "Why, sweet-

heart, with your talent, you could go places in New York."

"You never heard me sing. How do you know I can?"

"Anybody with Joe here is bound to be okay. Maybe you ought to do your hair blonde, though. . . ."

"Blonde?"

"Well, red, then. Blondes and redheads go over big in New York."

Blondes and redheads, was it? Blondes and redheads with their lipstick and their loud voices. She'd show him. Oh, sure, she'd show him. She'd show him a brunette with circles under her eyes down to here from seeing too much dirty gray Chicago sky these mornings. It was the mornings that were the trouble. That was it. The nights were fine. Nights you had the music and the easy fellowship of the boys in the band. The thing to do was to eliminate mornings. Well, good. That fixed everything just dandy.

She heard Claire go down the hall and into the kitchen. Bang! A pan dropped. Neither of the Jaynes girls was much good in a kitchen. Then the water ran and pretty soon the fine smell of coffee seeped down the hall. Coffee. That was the thing. Irene raised her head from under the tangle of covers and looked at the little electric clock. Nine-ten. Now there was a time of day for you. Nine-ten was going to have to be eliminated along with mornings. In the meantime, a cup of coffee might help. Irene rolled the bedclothes into a heap and got up. She put on a bathrobe and went out to the kitchen, yawning.

"Good morning, baby. What are you doing up at this hour?"

"What are you?"

"When Will isn't here I get kind of restless."

Irene sat down on the kitchen stool.

"Where's Will? Don't tell me. I'll remember."

"He went with that new unit to Detroit. He'll be back tonight."



"I knew I'd remember. Where's Sephronia?"

"She isn't coming today. Her sister's getting married."

"That's nice. You making enough for two?"

"Of course, baby. You're certainly looking terrible this morning."

"I just didn't sleep. Must be something I et."

"What? Every night?"

"What do you mean—every night?"

"Well, unless you're keeping a leopard in your room, I can't explain all the prowling around that goes on in there every night."

Irene looked suspiciously at her sister. But she was calmly feeding halves of oranges into the electric squeezer. *Her* hair wasn't tousled. It was brushed and shiny and her face was clean and rested.

"No, Claire. I'm not keeping any leopards. . . . Here, I'll do the toast."

"You'll burn it worse than I do. Never mind. You fix the tray. We'll eat in the dining room, shall we?"

"Can't we eat here?"

"What's wrong with the dining room?"

"Too early in the morning to face a big, empty room like that. Big empty rooms like that give me the creeps this early in the morning. Everything gives me the creeps this early in the morning."

Silently, Claire handed her the cup. The first hot sip of coffee was fine. We won't eliminate coffee. Just mornings.

"Why don't you give up and go join him, baby?"

"Huh? Join who?"

"You're not fooling anybody, Irene. Except, maybe, yourself. Why don't you just give up and go to New York and be with your Joe Geddes?"

Irene set down her coffee cup that she had been holding on to with both hands.

"Honestly, Claire, is it as obvious as all that?"

"Probably not to anyone else, honey. Will, for instance,

keeps saying you're working too hard. He keeps saying he was right all along in advising against you singing regularly with a band."

"Not with the Hot Five, though."

"No—only we didn't expect you to throw yourself into it the way you did. How long has it been now?"

"Darned near two years."

"I didn't mean how long since Joe went to New York."

"Well, I didn't mean that either. . . . Oh, what am I talking about? Of course, I meant that. I've only been singing with the band a little over a year."

"And working like a fool so you wouldn't be counting the time between his phone calls. Or how soon before you could go to New York again."

"He doesn't care whether I come or I don't."

"It's a little hard to say, isn't it, in the little time you give yourselves together?"

"Yes, I guess so. We always seem to be in a rush. I have to get back or he has to go to work. Or something. He used to want me to stay—only then I was so sure I didn't want to. Now—I don't know. And he hasn't asked me lately."

"You really haven't been there lately."

"I know. I don't like to let the boys down on the job. At least, that's what I keep telling myself."

"Will you do something for me, honey?"

"Sure. What?"

"Just sit there for a minute, nice and quiet, and think to yourself: 'Now how would it be if I just packed a suitcase and got on that New York train and went up there and saw him and said, 'Well, Joe, here I am. It isn't worth it for you to be miserable in New York and me to be miserable in Chicago. So I thought if I just came and stayed, things might be easier all around for us both. We could run around listening to music the way we used to do and maybe even do some work together.' . . . No, don't interrupt me yet, baby. Just sit there the way you are and think how it would

be if you went to him and said 'Why don't you pick up the horn, Joe, and play a little behind me now? Play for me while I sing. . . . Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should. . . .'" Claire Sylvester sang the lyrics softly, just the first two lines. Then she smiled and said, looking gravely at her sister, "Yes, that's what I thought."

"Why, Claire," said Irene, "I didn't know you could sing."

"Not good enough, baby."

"Okay. What did you mean when you smiled and said, 'Yes, that's what I thought.'"

"I meant that I thought my little experiment would work, and it did. I meant that I was pretty sure that if you would just let yourself think about going to him, it would smooth out that line on your forehead and make your eyes shine a little and lift up the corners of your mouth. And it did."

Irene got up and looked at herself in the little mirror above the kitchen sink. She looked at herself for a long time, and then she said, "Would you just run over the last part of that again, Claire?"

"Let's see . . . you go to him and you say: 'I give up, Joe. I give up trying to fight it any more. I know darned well the Hot Five isn't any fun without Joe. So here I am. And would you mind just running over a few bars of Irene's Blues with me, Joe. You know the way it starts . . . Got the blues. . . .'"

"I don't believe it," Irene said. "I simply don't believe it!"

She touched her forehead and the corners of her mouth. Then she turned away from the mirror and came over and put both her arms around her sister, from the back. She put her head down on the smooth, shiny, sweet-smelling blonde hair.

"You're the only one in this family has any brains, Claire. Shall I call him and tell him?"

"You know best about that, baby."

"It could be that he doesn't really want me, you know."

"That'll be up to you, too, baby."

"Ummmmmm. I suppose you could give Bobby a routine ring for me and square me with Will."

"Be delighted to. Don't worry about it."

"He was going to start working for Johnny Carlyle at the Park Hotel beginning of the summer. The five o'clock plane ought to get me in there just about the time he gets through. . . ."

Johnny Carlyle's band was playing and singing *Happy Birthday to You* when the waiter led Irene to a small table in the Peacock Room of the Park Hotel. Johnny Carlyle stood in the center of the room, with a spotlight on his wavy, blond hair and toothy smile, holding the hand of a young girl who looked very embarrassed. Carlyle waved his other hand to urge everybody to sing *Happy Birthday to You* for the young girl.

Irene scribbled a note and sent it up to Joe with the waiter. "My God! Is this a supper room or a kids' camp! Come on back and see me when you get through. Irene."

Carlyle went back to the stand and the band played its closing number.

"This little fife went to battle,  
Back in seventy-six,  
This little fife went to battle,  
And learned a lot of brand new tricks. . . ."

"No!" said Irene to herself when Johnny Carlyle's Number One Fife began to play the *Stars and Stripes Forever*. "I don't believe it!" She watched, fascinated the way you're fascinated by a snake, as the spotlight traveled from one fife to the next. It reached Joe. He got up from behind the picket fence of instruments in front of him, which included his sax and clarinet, of course, and also three fifes—one red, one white, and one blue—an ocarina, a piccolo and three funny

hats. Joe put on one of the hats—a big velvet one with purple feathers—and began to fife *I Found a Million Dollar Baby*.

At the table next to Irene, a fat man with a head as bald as a cake of soap, slapped the plump, hunched shoulder of the woman with him. He laughed in spasms. "Say, that's good," he said. "Listen to that, will you? That's real clever."

Irene put her hands over her eyes. The uniform. And the hat. He had never said anything about the uniform. Or the hat. Or the fife. What did they think they were doing to him? She sat there, not looking, till the band finished and left the stand. People began paying their checks and moving toward the door. Her waiter came and stood beside her table to suggest that it was time for her to go. But no Joe.

"You sure you gave my note to the right one? The skinny saxophone player on the outside? Joe Geddes?"

"Well!" he said—Joe, not the waiter. "This *is* a surprise!"

She looked up at him and understood what had kept him. He had changed out of that uniform. He was ashamed to have her see him in it.

"Pleased, Joe?"

"Why not?"

"I just thought you might be pleased."

"What happened? The famous Hot Five get fired?"

"No. I just decided to come."

"Why the hell didn't you phone?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd take a chance. Just got off the plane a couple of hours ago."

"Oh, you flew? Must have been in a hurry."

"I was, Joe."

"Well, that's Jaynes for you. Long time no see. Then—bam! Takes a plane."

"That's Jaynes all right. Let's get out of here, Joe, shall we?"

"We-el-l-l, it just so happens I've got a date. I don't know whether I can . . ."

"Joe Geddes! You haven't got any date you can't make tomorrow night. And anyhow, I don't believe it."

She was standing up beside him now and her eyes were bright and hard in a way he remembered.

"You win," he said. "Let's go eat."

They went to a place in 47th Street and had some chili.

"What's it all about?" he said.

"Okay, Joe. I asked for it. Look, it's as simple as this. I couldn't get along without you. I kept telling myself I could. I was the independent kid. I could get along by myself. But I couldn't. So I came. That's all.

He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply, slouching in his chair and squinting at her through the smoke. But his hand was trembling.

"Why should I care why you came? You came before and you went away again. You're always doing crazy things like that. Why should I care?"

"Only this time I'm not going away again, Joe."

"Oh?"

"No. Look, Joe, don't you miss me when I'm not here?"

"Why should I miss you? What does it get me? Life's too short to go around missing people all the time!"

"Joe!"

"That's the way it is. Listen, you don't need to think you can turn me off or on any time you want to."

"I don't, Joe. I just think you're being stubborn. But then so was I being stubborn. Only I had Claire to help me see how stubborn I was being."

"Oh, so it was Claire sent you running to New York!"

"Joe Geddes, you ought to have your head bashed in with that piccolo you play—"

He threw down his cigarette and pushed back his chair. His hands came down hard and tense on the top of the table.

"Joe! I'm not the one you act like this with. Darling, I could see what it's like. I was there. I heard it. I saw it.

I saw what they're doing to you. But not me, Joe—not *me!*”

She reached over and put her hands firmly over those tense fingers. She was talking very fast now, to get through to him.

“Look, darling, I should have come to you sooner. I was wrong. I admit I was wrong. But I'm here now—and I won't leave you. Don't you hear what I'm trying to tell you, Joe? I *couldn't stand* it without you. Even when I didn't know it, I couldn't stand it. When I wasn't working, I just moped around . . . couldn't sleep . . .”

“How do you think it was for me?” The fingers under hers began to relax a little. “And I couldn't even stand it when I was working. You saw me working. How'd you like it?”

“You've got to stop it, Joe. You know you've got to stop it, don't you?”

“Aw, I don't know what I've got to do. I drink too much. And I run around. And I try to forget that monkey suit and those damned piccolos and nothing seems to help. I . . .”

He began to talk then and he said all the things that had been smoldering inside of him for many months. Irene listened, her hands holding his firmly. When he reached for a cigarette with one hand, he was not really aware that he had pulled her round to his side of the table with his other hand. She sat close and let him talk.

“Some night,” he said finally, “I'm not going down to the job at all. Just send the instruments down. They've played the same old stuff so often they can play it by themselves. Just hang them out the window, they'll play it by themselves!”

“And then you can get a band of your own, like you did back home.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Fat chance in this town.”

He looked down at her now, sitting close beside him, as if he was seeing her for the first time that evening.

“Well, look who's here!” he said and he kissed her. “Lis-

ten, whatever happened to us? Never mind. It's un-happened now."

"You're glad I came, aren't you, Joe? You do want me to stay?"

"Honey, I want you so much I could eat you up!"

"I'm glad I came, too. I'm glad I gave up and came. I'm—well, what do you know—I'm happy again!"

"Good. I'm happy, too. Say, you know what let's do? Let's go *hear* this town! There's a place called the Morocco up in Harlem! Let's go hear it!"

"I'd love to. Oh, Joe, I'd love to! Do you realize you've never taken me to hear any real music any time we've been in New York! Let's go!"

The Morocco was a dingy little place on 135th Street. The bandstand was no bigger than a large table and only a flag-pole sitter would have been comfortable on what was called the dance floor. Smoke hung in festoons from the low ceiling and crawled up the rickety stairs that led to the street where it swayed and whirled in a slow, circular pavane every time the door opened. Matter-of-fact Negro couples sat at the tables, leaning casually in each other's arms, their voices full of richness when they laughed. There were white people, too, people who came to listen to the music, not to stare and drink and feel Bohemian and devilish. Then there were musicians. There were always musicians, who gathered here when their own jobs were over, gathered to play for themselves or to listen to other men who were playing for themselves. Men who came to escape the circus and roses school of music that infested New York in the early thirties and in which most of them made their living. Men who came to play till they forgot they had instruments in their mouths or under their fingers and only thought in terms of sound pouring out in strong, pulse-marked rhythm. Places like the Morocco in Harlem were places where you heard hot jazz, late at night, in New York in the early thirties.

Joe picked out a table at the far side of the room.



"I haven't been here for a long time," he said, "but I remember this is a good place to hear. The sound bunches up in the corners."

They sat down and ordered beer and this fellow came up and leaned over their table.

"Mind if I sit down?" he said, sitting down.

"Not at all. Drink?"

"Don't mind if I do. Gin."

He was a thin man, not young, with pale mahogany hair and a delicate, pointed nose and chin. He was very shabby and pale, as if he'd been sick a long time. Right now, he was pretty drunk. His face looked vague, the eyes not focusing.

"Work here?" Joe tried, tentatively.

"Huh? Oh, no. Just around." When his gin came, he drank it, and put his head down on the table.

They let it go. The band began to play *Honeysuckle Rose*, and the trumpet player got away on a solo. The mahogany-haired man raised his head to listen. When the trumpet player had finished, he got to his feet and went over to the stand. He took the horn gently from the young Negro who had been playing it and put it to his lips. The notes began to come out—slow at first, not many at first. He couldn't think any faster just then. The piano and drum filled in behind him. And then it began to come—a sound as crisp and clear as rain, impudent and free, a procession of tones like perfectly cut pieces of clear white marble marching in the sun.

Irene turned and looked at Joe. He was listening as if he were hearing a brand new sound. He was. He was hearing a sound that said that nothing stood between that shabby, pale man and the way he wanted the music to come out of the horn. He could afford to be careless about how he looked, even about what happened to him because he had a sure satisfaction in the music he held in his mouth. It was his shield and it protected him from fear and anger and worry and envy and defeat.

Did Joe Geddes have a shield and a satisfaction? No, he had Johnny Carlyle and his Number Three Fife. The horn faltered in the man's hands. Joe could see that it was an effort for him to blow the last, rounded, resolved phrase. But the tired look, the vague look was gone from the man's face. He looked—why, he looked happy! He was drunk, and he probably didn't have a job or a home or a girl or a family or a future. But he looked happy.

Was Joe Geddes happy? He had a job and a girl and could make a home and a family and a future. But was he happy? He didn't mean happy so that you laughed a lot and spread sunshine around, but happy so that it hung inside you like a center of gravity and showed in your face the way it showed in the trumpet player's face. Was Joe Geddes happy like that? He knew that he was not. Did he stand up there and play and say, in his playing, "This is the way it ought to go and the hell with you?" Joe Geddes knew that he did not. He was suddenly ashamed and he felt his face go hot. He turned his head away from the music.

"He's leaving, Joe. And you don't even know his name. We better go take him home."

"Huh? Why should we take him home?"

"Oh, no particular reason. Except he's drunk—and besides, I thought you were looking just then like a man thinking of getting together a good band. A man who might need a very good trumpet player, say."

He grinned at her in the old way.

"By God," he said. "You oughtn't to be *allowed* out alone with me!"

Then he took her by the hand and started for the door.

"Hurry up, for Pete's sake! We can't let that good a trumpet get away!"

## Chapter XII

JOE GEDDES SAT DOWN ON THE ONE CHAIR in his cubbyhole of a dressing room—which was right next to the kitchen of the Trapeze Club—and looked into the spotted mirror over the make-up shelf. Nobody had ever told him that leading a band was like this. His dreams about it had in no way pointed out the fact that, in order to lead a band, you had to stand up in front of it. You had to stand up in front and see all those faces hovering above the tablecloths like white flames in the dimness. For a minute, all those white flame faces seemed to rise up in Joe's stomach and he thought he was going to be sick.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

Irene had knocked, but she didn't wait for any answer before coming in.

"I can't do it. Listen, Irene, I can't do it." His voice sounded as if it were being drawn through the neck of a bottle.

"Can't do what?"

"Can't face those people. I can't face them gawking at me. Before, I just sat in my chair and played and nobody paid any attention to me. I can't do it."

She went over and stood in front of him. She was wearing the red satin dress he had helped her pick out in a Broadway store. A red satin dress that had cost \$7.95. It was very plain, but it was a beautiful, vivid red and she wore it like a uniform. She stood very straight, with her arms folded in front of her, and looked down at him.

"Look, Joe, this is your band, remember? This is the band it's taken you nearly a year to get together. This is the band you gave up all those fine-paying jobs to get together. You

and the boys worked on this band. So did I—when I talked Solly into giving us this job. And your first night on the job, you say you can't do it! You've got to pull yourself together, Joe!"

"I wish I was back in the Four Square where nobody even listened to us!"

"Oh, sure. Just play to please yourself. What do you care if anyone hears you or not? You only rehearsed everybody to death to hear what it sounds like yourself. The hell with people."

"That's not it. I like them all right. I want them to like us. But I can't face them!"

She put her arms around him.

"Yes, you can, Joe. All you have to do is turn around, when you get on the stand, and smile that silly, pleased grin of yours. How can I be the only one to love that silly, pleased grin of yours?"

Johnny stuck his pale mahogany-colored head of hair in the door.

"We're due back," he said.

Joe got up. There was a tight white line around his lips and his face was an even, all-over gray. But he said "Okay" to Johnny and he pressed one arm briefly around Irene's shoulder. Then he went out on the bandstand of the Trapeze Club. He hesitated a minute, started to give the boys the beat, then turned and faced the people and grinned. It was a grin that might have been drawn on his face with a paintbrush. But it was a grin, all right, and Irene made a small fist of her hand and gave the fist a little downward thrust of encouragement and approval. After he had grinned, Joe turned back to the band and ripped into *China Boy* as if he had written it. The boys picked it up in the second bar when they recognized it as Number 7 in the book.

This was the band that Joe Geddes took into the Trapeze Club. It was made up of guys with Joe's own gripe—sick to death of the music they were playing on whatever jobs

they had. Guys who came from someplace out west or down south where they learned the music straight from the time they were kids, from records and from little Negro jump bands; from piano players in saloons and from their own feeling. There was the mahogany-haired trumpet player Irene and Joe had heard that night at the Morocco. Clement Johns. Johnny, they called him. He didn't even like people to know his name was Clement. Johnny came from Texas. He was glad to go with Joe; he hadn't been able to take the music business as he found it in New York. Then there were Bobby Freeman and Danny Acosta and Tony Jacoby and Eddie Novik from the old Hot Five. Joe got them to come in from Chicago.

It wasn't easy to get eight other men that good. If they were that good, they probably had other jobs. The offer Joe made them—to play the music straight and clean and hot—was a tempting one, but you couldn't eat it. Musicians like to eat, just like other men. Their wives like to eat, too. And their kids, if any.

But, after nearly a year, Joe got eight other men together that were that good. He got a band that had bite and kick and guts to it. His brass section rocked with the momentum that sends a trapeze artist swinging from one bar to the other. His reed section played as if their four separate tones grew together. His rhythm section had a beat as strong and sure and effortless as the swell of waves against the shore. The whole band throbbed as if it were your own pulse—weak *strong* weak *strong*. Not your pulse the way your doctor counts it, marking only the obvious, steady, practical one two three four, but your pulse with the reaching, surging, almost-imperceptible upbeat: one *two* three *four* weak *strong* weak *strong*. That's what Joe Geddes meant by a rhythm that throbbed as if it were your own pulse. And his band had it.

This was the band Joe Geddes conquered his self-consciousness to lead. This was the band that, miraculously,

Irene found a job for—at the Trapeze Club, one of those little places in the Fifties where out-of-town salesmen and buyers go because it's downstairs and just off Broadway and therefore much wickeder than anything in Milwaukee or Dallas or Pittsburgh.

But the thing that Joe's band had, seemed to puzzle the customers of the Trapeze Club. The foolhardy ones who tried to maneuver their double hundred pounds around the dance floor to Joe's music, ended up by looking bewilderedly towards the stand, shrugging their shoulders, and going back to their tables. The ones who had come to drink and stir up a little vicarious vice, complained about the noise and asked to have their tables moved back, moved back out of range of Joe's full brass finale on *King Porter Stomp*, the way Fletcher Henderson had arranged it and Joe had bought it for Irene. It went on like that all week, but on Saturday night, it stopped. Saturday night, in the stillness that followed that all-out, screamer-deamer, naked-noise *King Porter* finish, a plaintive voice was heard. It said . . . "can't hear yourself think, for Christ's sake!"

The voice came from Solly's own table and it belonged to the blonde corset buyer from Philadelphia who was Solly's current passion. It wasn't that he wanted her to think, but he did want her to be happy and to consider him a great guy. He leaned towards her across the table.

"What'll you have, sweetheart? Just you name a tune and you can have it."

She was annoyed because when you've been screaming at jobbers all day, you want to relax and not have to scream over six loud brass instruments at your boy friend all night.

"Don't they play anything pretty? Something nice and quiet that you don't have to listen to. So you can hear yourself think, for Christ's sake!"

"Just you name it, sweetheart."

"Tell them to play *Missouri Waltz*."

"You got it, baby."

Solly walked confidently over to the bandstand. Joe was changing the reed in his clarinet and did not look up.

"Play *Missouri Waltz*, Mr. Leader." Solly never could remember Joe's name. "For a special little lady."

"Sorry," said Joe. "We don't know it."

"What d'ya mean you don't know it? Everybody knows *Missouri Waltz*."

"I just mean we don't play that kind of tune and so we never learned it."

"So!" Solly straightened up to his full five feet two. The red crept up over his balding head and he chewed his cigar so it bobbed up and down in the corner of his mouth. The corset buyer looked on admiringly. "So! I buy myself a bunch of second rate musicians that never learned to play *Missouri Waltz*. You listen to me, Mister Leader, you'll play *Missouri Waltz* or—"

"Or what?" Joe said, putting down his clarinet and beginning not to like the way this was going.

"—or you're fired!"

Irene got up from the little chair on the bandstand where she sat between numbers.

"Now wait a minute, Solly," Irene said. "You don't understand. It's a question of getting parts for all the boys. We'll fix up *Missouri Waltz* for you tomorrow."

"Oh, no, we won't," Joe said, getting down off the stand and still towering a foot above Solly. "No little sawed-off runt is going to call my band a bunch of second-rate musicians!"

"Sawed-off runt! Why, you—" Solly bent back to look into Joe's face. "Now you listen to me, you long-legged giraffe. I was going to give you your notice tonight anyhow. You play like a boiler factory. A person can't hear themselves think, for Christ's sake, when you play. You play too loud and too fast. You stink!"

Joe gave Solly a push to clear his path.

"Why, you lousy little son-of-a-bitch," he said. "You're not firing us. We're quitting!"

He started for the door.

"Joe!"

Irene stood with one hand outstretched toward him, one toward the still slightly staggering Solly. She looked over her shoulder at the band.

"He hasn't got a coat on," she said, helplessly. "He oughtn't to go out without a coat on."

"Go on, kid," Bobby whispered to her from the piano. "We'll finish the session."

She got their coats. By the time she reached the street door and looked back, the band was playing *Chicago*, not very loud. She saw Tony Jacoby over at Solly's table, talking earnestly. The corset buyer was smiling up into Jake's good-looking face. Jake was trying to fix things.

At the corner of 49th and Broadway, she caught up with Joe. He was pushing people blindly out of his way and walking fast.

"Put your coat on," she said.

"Put on your own. And go away!"

She threw his coat over his shoulders.

"I won't go away!" She grabbed his arm. "Joe, what came over you? What made you do it?"

He shook her off. "Go away! Telling us we stink! *We* stink, mind you!"

At 42nd Street, he turned east and, because she kept running beside him, refusing to be shaken off, he went into a movie. Irene had no money with her, so she stood at the door and waited—a girl in a vivid red dress and a brown cloth coat. A girl with black, blown hair and a white, strained face, standing very straight and saying to herself, "He's crazy! He shouldn't care so much! Nobody should care that much about something nobody else cares that much about. And he'll just go on till somebody does care. I can't stop him now. Nobody can. Oh, Joe, you crazy fool! You dope. You



crazy fool dope darling. Just because you play it straight and clean and hot everybody will be afraid of it. Everybody will hate you for it. Except me. I'll love you for it."

He came out in half an hour and she ran along beside him. At 34th Street, he stopped in front of a bar.

"Go on home," he said.

"I won't!"

He went inside and she waited. She waited outside bars at 23rd Street. And at 14th. At Houston Street, he said, "For Christ's sake, why don't you go home and leave me alone?"

"I haven't any money."

"Here," he said and gave her a five-dollar bill.

"I don't want to go home," she said.

He kept on walking, steadily, angrily, with his head down and his hands thrust hard into his coat pockets. She wanted to cry. She wanted to hit him, to trip him, anything to stop him. But she did not dare. She did not remember ever seeing him mad with this cold fury and she did not dare speak to him because his face was gray like stone and set like stone with rage.

The sky turned milky white, translucent like the inside of an egg shell. The city streets were empty and quiet now and the tall buildings of lower Broadway hovered above them in stiff, stern protection. Sometimes a truck or a garbage wagon passed them with a hollow rumble. Sometimes footsteps, echoing their own, sounded lonely and hopeless and metallic in a neighboring street. When they reached the Battery, he stopped and looked down, surprised, at the iron railing that kept him from walking right on into the harbor. The early morning wind blew his hair into his bloodshot eyes. He turned and looked down at her.

"You still here?"

Too tired to speak, she nodded. She put her hands down on the railing, and held on. She let out a miserable little sobbing squeak of fatigue and relief at hearing him speak.

He reached up and rubbed his hair all over his head, looking at her. She was shaking all over and no matter how hard she gripped the railing, the shaking wouldn't stop. He took off his coat and slipped it around her. He put his arm around her shoulder and gathered her to him firmly until the shaking stopped.

"You poor kid!" he mumbled into her hair. "I sure am a Jesus Christ fool! Let's go home!"

## Chapter XIII

IRENE WAKENED FIRST AND LAY FOR A long time looking at him. Beyond their window, the late afternoon noises of Broadway clanked and honked and rumbled. Beyond their door, hotel noises rattled and slammed and pattered. She and Joe were here together in a little hollow of shut-off quiet and she lay and looked at him and let run through her sleepy mind the things that came unbidden.

First, he had been the one who held and comforted her, riding up in the cab through the early morning New York quiet to his hotel. They had taken the telephone off the hook and slept. They had wakened and made love, hungrily, warmed by a great release. And then she had been the one who held and comforted him. It was as if the music had shut him out and she took its place. The music had gone, but she was there. In the time between sleeping and sleeping, she knew that there was something she meant to him, held for him, supported him with, that was not the music. They had never been so close. Then they slept again, a sleep from which both would wake to their knowledge of the hostile world they had challenged.

She knew Joe was never going to be quite the same again after that walk from 52nd Street to the Battery. When he left the Trapeze Club, he was an enraged, baffled, embittered young man of twenty-six, who had just been insulted—unexpectedly, with unmistakable sincerity, and by a man whom he considered his inferior in every way. He was a defeated young man, running away with his dream between his legs. When he left the Battery, he was mostly an exhausted young man, but he was also a wiser and more suspicious

one. And he was a young man with determination and will power, two qualities which had heretofore been notably lacking in his make-up.

What he thought about on that all-night pilgrimage, neither she nor anybody else would ever find out. If he thought at all. For Joe Geddes' mental processes had this in common with his musical ones: they moved in their own way—his own way towards their conclusions, and he did not consciously choose their direction. When he arrived there, he could not tell you how he had come—thought by thought or note by note. It was all the same to him whether he could or could not go back over the process, once he had worked it out, and he was always impatient with the people who could explain everything and do nothing. His was the kind of thinking which people call either intuition or stubbornness, depending on how successful the results are. If everything works out okay, it was intuition; if the thing turns out to be a bum steer, then it was stubbornness.

Joe Geddes didn't know how it would turn out, but he came to this conclusion: that Joe Geddes' band was the best band—white band, that is—in the city. And it was going to be the best god-damned band in the whole country. It was going to be a band that would knock people's ears out because it was so god-damned good. If people were not yet accustomed to listening to the kind of music he played, then he'd beat them over the head with it till they did listen, till they recognized its strength, its daring, its solidity, its beauty. The hard, clean guts it had. Its honesty. Its right to be heard. Its right to be heard in the best spots in the country, not just beat-up clubs and saloons and hide-aways and back rooms.

He wakened with his conclusion still sleep-misted in his head, and saw her looking at him.

"H'lo," he said.

"H'lo."

"You still here?"

"Still here, Joe."

He grinned sleepily and touched her shoulder with a lazy, groping hand. The hand slid down her arm and held her hand, hard.

"Still here." He flopped over on his stomach, not releasing her hand, and buried his chin in her shoulder. "That's good," he mumbled into the pillow. "That sure is good. That's terrific."

She turned her lips to rest, not moving, in his hair.

In a minute, he flopped back again, and reached for two cigarettes with his free hand. She lit them from his mouth, with her free hand, and they lay quietly and smoked.

"I'm hungry," he said then.

"Okay. Let's go eat."

She was in the shower when he began to talk. He was brushing his hair, stooping a little at the knees to see the top of his head in the bureau mirror, talking over the noise of the shower she was taking.

"That punk," he said, "trying to tell me what to play. Who's been playing the music all their life—me or him? Him and his *Missouri Waltz*. Anybody calls a tune a name like that ought to have his head examined."

"What's that, Joe?"

She turned off the shower and whisked the curtain back and stepped out of the tub.

"Gee! You're pretty!"

"Go away! I'm all wet!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette.

"Listen," he said, "I'm not through. Last night I thought I was. But not today. I'm going to show that jerk up so solid he'll never talk about boiler factories any more. Not to me. He'll find out what real music sounds like. Him and all the rest of them. *Missouri Waltz*!"

"You know you'll get in trouble with the union if you just walk out on the job. Maybe Jake fixed it with Solly last night." She was balancing on one leg, pulling on a stocking.

"The hell with it. I'm not going back there."

"I suppose it doesn't make any difference to you that the boys are all out of jobs if you walk out," she said over her shoulder from the bureau. "I hope you don't mind if I use your hairbrush."

"Go ahead. I don't mind. I'll get them other jobs. I'll get them jobs where we don't have to be kicked around by any half-baked jerk that thinks he knows something about music just because he hires us."

"And where will you get these fine jobs?"

"I'll haunt the booking agencies till I find somebody who knows good music when he hears it!"

"Maybe they don't want good music, Joe."

"Huh?"

"I said maybe they don't want good music. Maybe they do just want music that makes money. Nice, entertaining music. Nothing new and exciting and different. Maybe people are scared of anything that's different."

"That's a fine way for you to talk. You're the one got me started on this band thing, remember."

"You'd have done it yourself, sooner or later, Joe. You'd have had to. But maybe we're wrong about it. What if it's true that you have to do it the way Will does it—play it simple so people will like it and pay for it. Make a lot of money and don't think about the music at all. If you don't do it that way, if you care too much about the music, you go around making people sore at you like last night, because you get sore when they don't like the music. And they end up by firing you. Joe, what if you can't win?"

It was beginning to get dark outside. The electric sign on the theater across the street threw their shadows on the bathroom door in front of them. The room was very quiet, hung with a gray-blue gloom where the electric sign cut no swathe of light. The alarm clock on the bureau ticked noisily and, outside in the corridor, two men were coming home to wash up for dinner. Their voices were sharp and distinct, the way

people's voices sound when they call to each other in a hotel corridor.

"I guess downstairs's as good a place as any," one said, and turned his key in the lock with a brass rattle.

"Gimme an hour," said the other. "I gotta write the wife," and he turned his key in his lock. Their two doors banged simultaneously.

"Look, Joe," Irene said, putting her hand on his knee and looking up earnestly into his solemn face. "I don't want to be a wet blanket."

"That's okay."

"I just didn't know if you knew how tough it was going to be—for your kind of music, I mean."

"I guess I didn't think about it."

"I ought to keep my mouth shut. Maybe you oughtn't to think about it."

"If I thought about it, I probably wouldn't do it."

She laughed and looked at him and was pleased.

"Well, I said my two cents' worth. A lot of good it did!"

"Honey, you'd do me a lot of good if you couldn't speak a word!"

"That's good."

They lay back on the bed with their arms around each other and kissed. In the six o'clock quiet, the phone began making choked noises, so Joe picked it up.

"Where you been, Mr. Geddes?" the operator said loudly. "We been trying to raise you all day." Then she went on in a whisper, "You'll get me in trouble, you keep the receiver off the hook so long."

"Who wants me?"

"Here's your call, sir."

The stream of bad language that came over the phone was clearly recognizable by both of them as Bobby's voice. Joe held the receiver away from his ear until Bobby said ". . . and so the son-of-a-bitch told us not to bother coming back. He'd pay us our notice, he said."

"Good," said Joe. "That lets us out with the union."

"Good?" said Bobby. "What's good about it? What're we going to do when that money runs out? That's what Elaine wants to know. We owe practically all that money, Joe. We can't live on air and promises, like Elaine says. And, by the way, Johnny had an offer this morning from Whiteman. And Danny says he's going back to Chicago. He says this town stinks. I got an offer myself just a little while ago. That's what I called about. Guy wants me to play rehearsal piano with some show. . . . Well, that's how it shapes up. You got any ideas, Joe?"

"Hell, yes. I don't want you guys to go working somewhere else. I want you to work for me."

"Are you kidding? After last night? What at?"

"Listen, Bobby, I'm going to have a band that'll knock your eye out. Piano solos in every arrangement."

"Yeah?"

Bobby pricked up his voice, though, at the thought of all those piano solos, as Joe had intended that he should.

"Sure. You know that solo you used to play in *Anything for You*. Well, that's in."

"Sounds good, Joe, but I don't know what Elaine's going to say."

"What's Elaine got to do with it?"

Irene took the phone away from Joe.

"Hello, Bobby," she said. "This is Irene."

"Hiya, Irene. He on the level or just slap happy?"

"He's on the level all right, but I wouldn't buy any yachts on it. What's with Elaine?"

"Yachts! Say, kid, we're going to be owing room rent."

"That's what I mean. Any of the boys that can get jobs better get them. How can we tell when the break will come? What's Elaine got to do with what?"

"Well, she's kind of—I been telling her the band we got is good. You know that, don't you, Irene?"

"Yes, I know that."



"And we can make it better. And Danny and Eddie and Jake and Johnny and I want to go along. But, after all—listen, Irene, will *you* talk to Elaine?"

"Why, yes, sure, Bobby. Only what's it all about?"

"You know me, Irene. I don't need much. Long as they let me play the music the way it's good, they don't have to pay me a million dollars. You know how it was in Chicago. They don't have to pay me more than scale."

"Get to the point, Bobby. What's this all leading up to?"

"Here— I'll put Elaine on. She's going to have a baby."

"Oh. Oh, I see."

"It kind of changes things. I mean—oh, Christ! I don't know what to do. I'll get her."

In the pause that followed, Joe looked over at her lazily from where he was stretched out on top of the twisted blankets.

"What goes on?" he said, without much interest. "Bobby griping to you about that rehearsal piano job? Him playing rehearsal piano!"

She started to tell him, then thought better of it. The idea of having a baby seemed so completely unrelated to Joe Geddes. You couldn't play it on a clarinet, could you? No, you couldn't. You could imagine Joe Geddes with a cauliflower ear more easily than you could imagine him with a baby.

"Hello, Irene." Elaine's voice sounded tired and angry. Bobby and she must have had a bad fight.

"Hello, Elaine. What's this wonderful news Bobby's been telling me?"

"What's wonderful about it? Where am I supposed to have the kid—on top of a piano? Where are we supposed to live? We'll be put out of here on Tuesday. And now Bobby wants to stay with a band that isn't even working—because the leader walked out on the job in a fight!"

"It wasn't exactly a fight, Elaine. But it wasn't such a smart thing to do, you're right."

"No, it wasn't smart and where does it get us? I have to have some place to live, Irene. Maybe I wasn't cut out to be a musician's wife. But I love Bobby and I'm his wife and I want to stay his wife and I don't know what to do. It was all right before we knew about the baby, but now I've got to have some place to sit down. I'm—I'm tired. And worried. And—oh, I don't know . . ."

She was crying. It must have been quite a bad fight.

"Don't cry, Elaine. You tell Bobby to take that job. Just as soon as we get anything, we'll get hold of you. Try not to worry. Try to be happy about the baby."

"I want Bobby to be happy, too, but—"

"I know. But you have to eat. You have to eat for two now, I hear people always saying."

"That's silly. But you do have to eat the right things. And see the doctor. And it all takes money."

"That's right. You tell Bobby to take that job."

"Hey!" Joe sat up on the bed.

"He won't do it unless Joe says to."

"Okay. Put Bobby on. Joe'll say so."

She turned to Joe.

"You get on this phone, Joe, and tell Bobby to take that rehearsal job."

"What do you mean—and ruin my rhythm section?"

"Joe, Elaine's going to have a baby. They need the money. When you get your band working, you can get him back—when you can pay him steady."

"I got to have him to rehearse."

"Not that bad, you don't."

"Now you listen here, Irene, don't go interfering with the band."

"Oh, Joe, you goon. Did I ever?"

"Well, no, but . . ."

"If you don't tell him to take that job, I walk out of here—for good."

The words surprised her. Her saying them surprised her.

They were a threat. And, as she heard herself threatening him, she realized that she meant it quite calmly. Quite seriously. If Joe couldn't see that this was the thing he had to do, she'd want to leave him. Well, she'd feel she had to, anyhow. But she was surprised that Elaine's baby was so important to her.

Joe picked up the phone.

"Bobby? You there, Bobby? Listen, you can't take that rehearsal job!"

Irene stood still, listening, not believing her ears. Then she slipped the vivid red satin dress over her head and reached for her coat.

"I'm going out and round up the guys now," he was saying. "We'll have a band like the one we had at the Four Square. Only bigger."

She put on her coat. She wasn't going to cry, but she felt cold and dead all over.

"No, Bobby," Joe said. "It can't wait. I—"

She turned the doorknob slowly. It was very sad and the incident itself seemed completely out of proportion to the sadness she felt. Why was this so important? Why was she so sure it would make a difference between them what he did now?

"Wait a minute, Bobby."

He turned to look at her. "It'll be all right, honey," he said. "You'll see."

She opened the door and stepped into the hall. Two men came out of doors across from Joe's room.

"Well, I see you got your letter written," one of them said.

"She worries if she doesn't hear," said the other. "Got an air mail stamp?"

Irene closed the door behind her, and leaned against it for a moment. She heard Joe talking inside.

"Listen, Bobby," he was saying, very loud. "I changed my mind. You take that job. S'long now. I gotta run. Keep in touch, guy."

He got up noisily from the bed, knocking over the telephone and the ashtray and the cigarettes and his wristwatch as he started for the door. But she had already opened it and started back into the room. They nearly ran into each other with a hard bump and then they just stood, holding each other close, not saying anything.

## Chapter XIV

WHEN JOE HAD SPENT HIS LAST NEGOTIABLE hundred bucks for an arrangement of *I Found a New Baby*, Irene got herself a job in a little place on Eighth Avenue, singing and playing the tiny floor piano from nine to two. The place was called Mulrooney's and it was near Madison Square Garden. It was a place with blue-and-white-checked tablecloths in back and booths in front. There was a bar for beer, but you could get liquor if you were known, in cups. Irene worked at the little piano between the booth section and the tablecloth section. She got her dinner and thirty dollars a week. She and Joe lived on that thirty dollars.

Afternoons, she went over and sat around while the band rehearsed. It was hard to describe what happened at those rehearsals. In a bare room at 53rd and Broadway. The windows dirty. The floor unpainted. One of the most unprepossessing sights in the world—fourteen men in shirt sleeves or sweaters, sitting around on funeral parlor chairs, blowing or beating or slapping. Hunched up on the smalls of their backs, looking down the bores of trumpets, holding saxophones between their knees. Johnny with that torn and sweated felt hat on the back of his head. Danny, not so fat now, but just as sloppy as if he were. An arranger named Simpson sitting in on piano for Bobby. Eddie folding his face into wrinkles around the mouthpiece, gritting his eyelids together, looking as if he were about to gobble up the horn itself.

It was hard to describe what happened at rehearsals because nobody had any way to describe it. Nobody tried. They just did it. Nobody knew exactly how to say what it was

that hadn't come off when it didn't come off. None of them had been trained to communicate with each other in the musical terms used by symphony orchestras. Most such musical terms wouldn't have expressed it anyhow. How do you say "Make it start easy and dirty and low-down, build it up to a sock like a building fell on you, and take it out hard and fast" in the easy Italian of pianissimo and allegro and ma non troppo? They didn't try.

They rewrote half the arrangements as they rehearsed them. There was a number, for instance, called *I Would Do Anything For You*. Irene listened to them doing it one afternoon. Joe took the first solo on the clarinet, pressed three notes till they bled, reached for a C, made it grow and give off splinters. Then Johnny came in with a growl and spit out brass notes like the inevitable unwinding of a ball of string. And the tutti sprang to life and the walls seemed to throb with rhythm. The dreary rehearsal hall was full of color and light. Irene wanted to spread her arms and leave the ground—to dance, to fly, to sing. Sing she did on the repeat, and they kept her chorus in.

"I don't know how you do it, Joe," Irene said, afterwards, her breasts still rising and falling with exhilaration. "It's so good it takes your breath away. It's so full of good, red blood!"

He came over to her, smiling sheepishly and sweating. Now that he was through playing, his face looked tired again, but he grinned and put an arm around her shoulder. "It's okay, huh?" he said, knowing how okay it was.

Later, when the record had sold half a million copies, a lot of people agreed that it was okay. But not now. Now, Joe spent hours doing the rounds of the agents. Up and down in elevators, in and out of offices, trying to get the jolly, capable, hard-looking men behind the desks in the booking offices to listen to a record, just listen to a test record. Just come over some afternoon and listen to the band. "Could I see Mr. Whoozis, please? Joe Geddes." And

a bright-eyed girl with red fingernails would write on her memorandum pad "Joe Geddes to see Mr. Whoozis." Then he'd sit on a bench by the elevator and listen while she phoned in his name several times. But Mr. Whoozis was always busy or out of town or just on his way out or just on his way in or just on his way. Could Mr. Geddes come back Tuesday? Why not? Mr. Geddes was not on his way anywhere, it looked like.

There was nothing she could do to help him now but keep him going till the break came. Wait. Tread water. Play and sing every night at Mulrooney's. "Won't you come along with me (Come along with me); To the Mississippi (To the Mississippi); Where all the dark and the light folks meet; Heaven on Earth, this is Basin Street. . . ."

It was easy and pleasant and the people were fun. People like Bo Lashky, for instance. Bo Lashky was a fighter who would come in with his manager after a fight and sit at a table near the piano and drink beer. Bo Lashky was not, of course, his right name. He told Irene his right name once, but she was never able to pronounce it and couldn't imagine having to spell it. He was not yet successful enough to be able to afford tailor-made suits that would cover up his bulging muscles and still fit him in the waist, so his arms and shoulders always looked too big for his cheap suits. He had coarse black hair, not stiff-looking, but curling a little, even cut as short as it was, and his jaw was curved with strength. His cheekbones were high and stood out in an abrupt line as if a sculptor had made an impatient swipe at the clay in impotent rage at having to mold strength and softness into the same face bones. There was nothing the matter with Bo's face because he hadn't been fighting very long, but some nights when he came in, one eye would be swollen or there would be a patch of adhesive across his jaw somewhere. He was always very clean and neat, except for his shirt collars which had to be pinned shut across his big throat.

Irene never paid any more attention to him than she did to the other customers. She sat at her own table near the piano and did her numbers every half hour or so, and talked pleasantly with the people who wanted to talk. Mulrooney's was an easygoing, quiet place. No razzle dazzle. No neurotics out to prove they were having a good time. Just people who worked nights and liked to drop by for a quiet beer and a sandwich to unwind a little from the evening's performance before they went home to bed. Working people. Bus drivers. Cowboys. Sports writers. Hockey players. Actors. Circus performers. Fighters. Irene liked her nights at Mulrooney's, sitting relaxed and peaceful, working and waiting for Joe to come and pick her up. "Ain't you glad you came with me (Glad you came with me); Down the Mississippi (Down the Mississippi); You saw the place where the folks all meet; Heaven on Earth, they call it Basin Street. . . ."

"That's a good song."

She looked over at him, as she slid into her bench against the wall.

"Well, gee, thanks," she said.

"I'm Bo Lashky. You met me the other night with Mike. Mike Provo. Remember? Mike's my manager."

"Yes, I remember. Certainly I remember. Mike did all the talking. He said you'd just won your fourteenth fight. You didn't say anything."

He smiled, and a low growl that she supposed passed with him for a laugh, stirred way back in his throat.

"Yeah, that's me," he said. "Never talk much when Mike's around."

"Well, we'll have to teach you to talk then. We can start with simple words like uppercut and knockout and left to the jaw. . . ."

"Not those words. I know those words. Try words like music and songs and singing and—well, and Irene."

"Why, Mr. Lashky!"



"Like your name. Names with us are all like Katina and Janicka and Olga. Hard names. Irene, now, that's a soft name."

She let the personal inference go by. It was better on jobs like this to let the personal things go by.

"And might I inquire who is 'us'?"

"Sure," he said easily. "'Us' is a bunch of Slovaks back home on the South Side in Pittsburgh. Men work in the mills and the girls go to church. Katina and Janicka and Olga—all of them."

"Did you work in the mills, too, Bo?"

"Sure. Where'd you think I got these?" He didn't flex his muscles or anything, just kind of shrugged his shoulders. The muscles were evident enough.

"Well, I guess I didn't think about it at all. Fighters have muscles. Singers have voices. I don't know. . . ."

"Me, I'd sooner sing than fight."

"Can you?"

"Some. Not good. Home nights, we sing. Olga plays the guitar. Olga's my sister. Not like you, though. Funny thing. Home, it's all those songs about the old country. Me, I like that one about the Mississippi. I know about the Mississippi. Was born here. Went to school here."

"What's so funny about it? My father was always singing those songs about Scotland. They never meant a thing to me. I feel a lot closer to Eighth Avenue than I do to Loch Lomond."

The low growl rumbled briefly. He wanted to buy her a drink, but she was already looking at her watch, a little tired of this conversation, hoping Joe wouldn't be late.

"Hope you don't mind me butting in like this, Miss Irene," he said.

"No, Bo, I don't mind."

"Sure get tired of that fight crowd. Like Mike okay. He's the one pulled me out of the mill. My old man got hurt in the mill. Hasn't walked since. So I was glad to get out of

there. Glad to get out of this racket, too. Make some dough, and get out."

"Yes. Yes, a good fighter can make a lot of dough, I guess."

"He can get hurt, too."

She turned and looked at him again. His voice was very gentle for a prize fighter—for what she had always thought a prize fighter's voice was like.

"Are you afraid of getting hurt, Bo?"

"Afraid? Nope, not afraid. Kind of useless. What for? Like my old man got hurt in the mill? I got other things to do besides get banged up in the ring. For who?"

She didn't answer that because she saw Joe come in the door. He looked nervous and tired. He spent most of his nights listening to bands—in Harlem or any place where somebody said there was this terrific drummer. Or sax. Or trombone. When he saw her, he smiled and came over and slid in beside her, knocking Bo's beer off the table as he did it.

"Oh, Christ, I'm sorry," he said. "Here, let me get you another one. Me, too. I'm dry. Hey, Jeff! Three beers."

"Not for me, Joe."

"Two beers, Jeff. I been arguing with that fool Bobby all night. Him and his rehearsal piano. He's got an offer to go into the pit band of a show. I been telling him to wait, just wait another week."

"Why didn't he come along with you?"

"Oh, he had to get back to Elaine. You'd think people didn't have babies every day. You'd think this was the only baby was ever going to be born in the world."

Bo laughed in his throat and said, as if he were with them, "Gotta humor them when they're having babies."

"This is Bo Lashky, Joe. He's the one whose beer you knocked over. He's a fighter. This is Joe Geddes, Bo."

They shook hands over the beers and Joe said, "How's things in the rings, Bo?"

"Okay, my manager keeps telling me."

"Now you see," said Joe, with elaborate sarcasm. "Fighters

got managers. Maybe we could get Bo the Mo's manager here to take our band on. Maybe fight managers are just what we need. No band managers seem to be interested in us, I'll say that."

Irene said hastily, over Bo's growling laugh, "He's got managers on the brain, Bo. You see, he's got a terrific band and nobody seems to want it. Yet, that is."

"Want me to speak to Mike?"

Even Joe got a laugh out of his earnestness.

"Thanks, pal. I'm afraid it's a little out of your line. I spent part of the afternoon up at Management Corp again today. For God's sake, the times she's written my name on those little pads, you could paper a wall. Wouldn't you think the guy would be in once, just once?"

"He can't even get anybody to listen to the band so far, Bo. It's pretty discouraging."

"Yeah. Less they can make money on you, they ain't interested."

"It's okay, Bo," Joe said. "Let's get out of here, honey."

With clumsy efficiency, Bo paid for the drinks. "See you," he said, when they left him standing on the corner, looking big and forlorn. They turned east on 49th Street, walking close. Irene slipped her arm in Joe's.

"That was a funny guy," Joe said. "Not like any fighter I ever met."

"How many fighters have you ever met?"

He laughed, and she was glad to hear him laugh. It was past three, and the streets were quiet. The hand of the sky, stirring toward dawn, pressed lightly down on the quiet streets to permit the day to emerge. Joe and Irene were quiet, too, walking the last block to their hotel. She was sleepy, and she leaned her head against his shoulder in the elevator. The coffee-faced kid who ran the elevator yawned widely while the cage wobbled and creaked its upward way.

"When you gonna get a license to run this thing?" Joe asked him.

He came out of his yawn and grinned at them. He liked Joe.

"Once I get through school, you can stick this thing," he said.

Irene was yawning, too, as Joe put the key in the door.

"So many people," she said, "and all wanting to do something else. Hey! I wonder what it is Bo the Mo wants to do. I'll bet he does it, too. You know, Joe, he has a very convincing way. Quiet, but convincing."

"Yeah, convincing behind a good right to the jaw. That punk!"

He wasn't a punk, though. Irene could see that he wasn't a punk. He came in often when he was in town, sometimes with Mike, more often by himself. He sat quietly and listened to her sing. He talked in his gentle voice and laughed his growling laugh. It was pleasant, and it was company between seeing Joe. Then he took to bringing her gardenias, the ones you bought from the guys on the street for a quarter. He called them "roses" and he carried them in the palm of his hand, stretched out in front of him, as if he were afraid of what his bigness might do, not meaning to, with so fragile a thing.

"What's he trying to do, make you?" said Joe.

"I never thought of it. I honestly never thought of it."

But, just the same, she was careful about the "roses." She would manage to drop them or leave them on the piano or something so Joe wouldn't notice. Joe's nerves were a little on edge. A little? They were on edge like a cliff. It had been five months now. Five months—and nothing happening. Talking to Joe was getting to be kind of a strain. Talking to anybody was kind of a strain. But Bo the Mo was the one who noticed it. That was the thing about Bo. He noticed.

"Something bothering you, Irene?" he said to her carefully one night in May. He came in early, around ten, and the place was almost empty. He was just back from a fight

in Pittsburgh, and he was looking so peaceful and satisfied she could have slapped him.

"No, nothing's bothering me, Bo. How was Pittsburgh? They roll out the red carpet for you? And the brass band?"

He growled his laugh.

"Sure. And eat. Say, my mother must of killed a cow. Okay fight, though. Paid off."

"Well, that's nice. That's nice something pays somebody off."

He looked at her and his face reddened.

"I'm sorry, Bo. I didn't mean to sound edgy. I guess I'm just tired. I'm glad you made out okay in Pittsburgh."

"Something's bothering you," he said. "Don't stall with me, Irene. Racket I'm in is as tough as the one you're in. We don't need to stall about it. Wanna let me ask you a question and you won't get sore?"

"Sure, Bo. I won't get sore."

"You need money?"

She looked at that steady, rock-like face, sober with concern. She touched his arm lightly, and the touch brought a warm feeling of friendship back to her heart from her fingertips. "No, Bo, I don't need money."

"Well, couldn't tell. It's tough, holding out for a break. Made some dough in Pittsburgh." He reached in his pocket and brought out a pile of bills half an inch high. The top one was a ten. It might have been five hundred dollars. Irene felt hot tears in her eyes.

"Bo, I don't know what to say. I don't need the money. Really I don't!"

She had a sudden desire to reach over and kiss him. What was this, for heaven's sake!

"Well, couldn't tell," he said again. "Thought it over a long time. Figured—if you wouldn't be sore—figured you could say I like your singing this much worth. Sure you're not sore?"

She was going to try to say "No, I'm not sore," if she

could manage it with that thing in her throat, when Jeff the waiter hollered over, "Telephone, Irene!" She got up, shaking her head in what she hoped was adequate answer, and went to the phone booth.

"You holding on to something?" Joe said in her ear.

"What? Am I what?"

"Better grab something quick to hold on to. Guess who I got with me?"

Before she could pull herself together enough to guess Harpo Marx or President Roosevelt, another voice said, "What do you mean, hiding out in a West Side dive that doesn't even have union scale or pay a decent, hard-working agent a percentage? Any chance of you getting off the job early tonight? There's a lot of stuff to talk over and I got a long, tough day tomorrow over a conference table. You want a job singing with Joe Geddes and his Orchestra?"

Surely nobody else they knew talked like that. Nobody else they knew blew the language about with that airy disregard for question and answer.

"Frank?" she said weakly. Then, "Frank! Where are you?"

"Over at the hotel. Be there in five minutes. 'Bye."

She hung up slowly, and walked back to her table. Bo's money lay on it and Bo was fingering it absently. He looked up and said, "Okay?"

"I'm darned if I know. That was a screwy cousin of mine from back in Iowa. He's coming over here with Joe any minute now."

"Well," said Bo, "guess I'll blow." He picked up the money. "Sure now?" he said, looking straight at her. She nodded. "Meant to tell you, Mike's taking me out west next week."

"Out west? Well, have a nice trip, Bo."

He dug in his vest pocket and produced a card.

"You ever need me, you write here," he said.

The card had Mike Provo's name on it with his Broadway

office address and phone. In quotes at the bottom, it said, "Provo Builds Only Champs."

"I'll be sure to let you know, Bo," Irene said.

"You do that," he told her, and left with a dignity hard to believe in such a hulk of a man.

Joe and Frank passed him on their way in, but they were too excited to notice. Frank looked just the way he always had. He wore no hat, and he kept pushing his hair back in that old gesture that was not impatient but rather an excuse for expending his energy. He still gave you the impression that, come a good puff of wind, he would brush his hair back and be carried away with it. He kissed Irene briefly, in the manner of a small, worrying breeze, and they both squeezed into the bench beside her.

"Where did you dig him up?"

"Memorandum pad miracle."

"Don't tease. I can't stand it. I've been through too much already."

"Nothing that's happened to you could tie this."

"Very simple, really. Very simple. I get in from Chicago today, after a longish stretch on the Coast. And there, in simple English letters on a memorandum pad on Mort's desk is the name Joe Geddes. Right on a memorandum pad in the office right next to mine. Nice boy, Mort, but not adventurous. Handles Lombardo."

"Wait a minute, Frank. What office are you talking about?"

"My office, of course."

"Listen, dopey. He's with Music Management Corp."

"MMC?"

"Certainly. Have been for nearly three years. And I must say that the moral of this is that you'd do well to keep in touch with your relatives better than you do, Irene Jaynes!"

"But what—how—"

"It's a long story and a tedious one. All the way through

college, I kept trying to play those damned drums. But you know I never really could. I gave it up finally. But I couldn't seem to stay away from bands. Hung around the store at home for a while, but I couldn't stand that, so I lit out for Chicago and wound up with MMC. And have I got bands! Build 'em . . . buy 'em . . . sell 'em. It's not like playing in them, you understand, but I love it!"

"Frank, you're crazy!"

"But in a smart way."

"It still doesn't explain what all this means to us."

"Honey, you're not very quick tonight. Though I didn't believe it myself at first," Joe said, putting his arm around her.

"Look! Will somebody please start at the beginning? Wait a minute—not somebody—Joe. Nobody could depend on Frank to make a clear, understandable, straightforward story!"

"Is this the kind of girl I have to put under contract?"

"Shut up, Frank! Joe, tell me what it's all about."

Frank said, "Drinks first. Stories later. Gin fizz for me."

Jeff brought their drinks and then Joe explained. She liked looking at him while he was explaining. His eyes were very bright and a little puzzled still and the lines around them had smoothed themselves from worry lines, tight and tense, to smiling ones, nice and easy.

"It was like this, honey. I'm sitting there in the room, figuring how we're going to meet the rent with what we squeezed out of your salary, and the phone rings. This voice says, 'Is this the Joe Geddes used to play saxophone with the Muscatine Friars Rhythm Band?' "

"You see, I just got in late and saw this memo and had to call right away."

"Shut up, Frank. Go on, Joe."

"I said 'Yes' in an offhand sort of way and then this voice says 'Well, I'm a snake with feet!' Well, like Frank said, he just got in and saw the memo with my name and clicked



on it. And to think the times I been up there and couldn't even get in! And him working for them all the time!"

"And the moral, as I said a minute ago, is to keep in touch with your old friends—and especially when you need them. Now what I want Joe to do first is make some records. Then we'll set him up on the coal circuit—Scranton, Pottsville and so on. Then we'll do a cross-country tour. In the meantime, we push the records. Always works."

"But you haven't even heard the band yet!"

"Tomorrow will do. How can it be bad?"

"Oh, Frank, you darling—you utter darling!"

"Darling, is it?" But he was pleased. "Do you realize I've spent the whole evening trying to convince Joe I knew what he was trying to do?"

"You can't blame him, Frank, for thinking everybody in the business end of the business is an icky phony. Not to put it more politely and call them bastards. Excepting yourself, of course!"

"I see what you mean. But here's the point. Everything is ripe for Joe's kind of music. With the proper management—my own, I might modestly say . . ."

"Sure. Say it."

"With my management, you kids are going to go places. And I am going to get back my lost youth. I wish I could believe in heaven the way I believe in Joe's band."

"Frank, you darling!" It seemed to be all she was able to say.

"And here's a fine thing, by the way. Joe was so suspicious of me that I had trouble convincing him to sign a contract—a contract, mind you, where MMC is willing to forego percentages until the band clicks."

"You're that sure, Frank?"

"I'm that sure, baby."

"How about that, honey?"

"It'll be like old times, kids. Remember that summer with the Muscatine Friars, Joe? Oh, God, how young we were!"

Do you realize that it was nearly ten years ago? Ten years, my God! And that sax we borrowed from the fellow had the mumps. Hey, did you ever get the mumps? No, of course you didn't. Ten years—my God!”

“Stop dragging up memories, Frank. I have to go on again in a minute and you'll have me crying!”

“Go on again? Are you crazy? You're getting out of here. We got a lot of stuff to do tomorrow. Can't be hanging around here. Just long enough for one drink and you tell whatever his name is runs the joint that you're leaving.”

Jeff brought their drinks and they told him instead. Just before she got their things, Frank offered a toast.

“Make way for Joe,” he said.

They touched their cups, drank solemnly, and went out arm-in-arm.

## Chapter XV

OF THE 130,000,000 PLUS PEOPLE IN THE United States, probably not more than a few thousand have ever taken a road tour with a dance band. It is far from being a universal experience. It is also far from being a pleasant one. Riding all night in a big bus, if it's a long jump between towns. Getting in just in time for a sandwich before going to the big, empty dance hall where you'll play from nine till one or two. Climbing back in the bus after the job and riding to the next town. Every night hundreds of strange faces looking at you wonderingly and impersonally. Faces that are not strange to each other, but are strange to you. Taking the impact of each strange new town with its strange new personality and its strange new streets, hotels, restaurants, theaters, busses, streetcars, newspapers, automobile licenses. If the jumps are long and you're not getting much sleep, your head throbs with the motor of the bus and the beat of the music alternately. All the bandstands are drafty if it's chilly or rainy and you drink straight whisky to keep from catching cold. You smoke too many cigarettes because there's really nothing else much to do on the bus or between sets on the job. There's a constant scramble for food and laundries, for tailors to press suits and places to get a good haircut. All the little things that fasten an even ordinarily hectic life into some kind of pattern are themselves shaken into daily irregularity.

Nobody was thinking about the unpleasantness, though, on the bright June noon when they met on West 43rd Street to pile into the big gray and blue bus that had "JOE GEDDES AND HIS ORCHESTRA" painted on the side. On that morning, everybody was clean and pressed and had a good New York

breakfast inside of him. The instruments and the music were stored away in the back of the bus and there was nothing to do but stand around till everybody got there and then pile into the bus and go. Danny and Johnny were already inside. They never stood around any place if they could sit.

"Well," said Frank, pumping Joe's hand up and down for the tenth time, "you're on your way, Joe. Don't forget that Bill here is the guy will take care of all the details for you. He knows the road like a book. How many bands you made this jump with, Bill? Remember the time the bookings got mixed up on a holiday and you couldn't even find the Lombardo band for three days? It's a crazy business, the road, but the best medicine in the world. Well, it's nearly time."

Bill Meredith was used to Frank by now, as used to him as Joe and Irene were. Bill just stood there, leaning against the big plate-glass window of the bus terminal, smoked and nodded, and let Frank talk. He was slender and elegant, Bill Meredith was, with a hard, lean body and narrow eyes in a long, tough face. He let the smoke of his cigarette curl up past his narrow eyes lazily.

"Listen," said Joe, "what's keeping Bobby? Everybody's here but Bobby."

"And the driver," said Irene. "We can't go without the driver."

Bill Meredith spoke in a slow, steady voice. Somebody had to speak in a slow, steady voice.

"Drivers never show up till the last minute. And I just talked to Bobby. His wife's having that kid this week and he's fit to be tied. I sent Frank's secretary to get him in a cab."

The Paramount clock said twelve forty-five. People passing in the street looked curiously at the huddle of men and a girl, standing around the big bus that had "JOE GEDDES AND HIS ORCHESTRA" painted on the side. They were ordinary New York noontime crowds and they looked curiously at anything unusual on the sidewalks. A couple of kids, draped

over a nearby ashcan, looking, had to jump aside smartly when the cab with Bobby in it pulled up to the curb, brakes screeching.

Bobby tumbled out and started talking to Joe right away. "I can't go, Joe. I can't leave her now. She's expecting the kid any day now. It's premature. I can't go, Joe!"

"It's okay, Bobby." Frank patted him on the shoulder and talked very calmly, for Frank. "Elaine's going to be all right. She'll probably be glad to have you out from under foot, the state you're in. You're a lucky man. You'll see your kid when it looks like something, in two or three months, not a little red ball thing crying like hell."

Bill Meredith walked languidly over to the waiting cab and paid the driver. Joe sat down suddenly on the running board of the bus.

"I give up," he said wearily and rubbed his hair all over his head. "I give up right this minute!"

Irene put her arm around Bobby, too. "It'll be all right, Bobby. Honest it will. I talked to Elaine last night on the phone. You know she's not scared or anything. Her mother's here, after all. She's fine. You're the one that's upset, not Elaine. And, come to think of it, who was the one kept Joe from riding you when you first knew about the baby? Was it me or wasn't it?"

"It was you all right."

"I'm going to be its godmother. You think I want anything to be wrong about it? It'll be all right, Bobby."

"Well . . ."

She steered him gently toward the door of the bus.

"It'll be all right, Bobby," she said persuasively. Then, "Hey, what am I so bothered about? It's not my kid!"

There were some laughs at that and everybody started towards the bus. The driver showed up, rolling his shirt sleeves to the elbow and tossing his coat on the seat.

"Let's go!" he said.

They went, with a roar of gears and a cloud of exhaust out the back. They went west through the Holland Tunnel—

seventeen people in a little bus-bound world that would spew them out periodically at dance halls, amusement parks, and theaters; then scoop them up again for other dance halls, amusement parks, and theaters. A tight and lonely world from which they would be, to their friends, and families, only names and addresses on square white envelopes post-marked Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Des Moines, St. Louis, Denver—stopping places in a distant and alien world which permitted them no closer contact with their ordinary lives than the impersonal efficiency of the United States Mail. . . .

Philadelphia, Pa.

Hello, Elaine, Darling,

The reason I sounded so abrupt to your mother on the phone last night, I was just excited, that's all. I guess your mother thinks I'm crazy, but wouldn't you know he'd be born as soon as I left. All I could think of to say was That's great or something like that and How is she, meaning you. Imagine me with a son. Jesus. Well, mind you phone me just as soon as you're able to be up. I'll let you know where we can be reached. I'll send you a hundred bucks as soon as we get paid. Show it to your mother bill by bill so she can see all musicians aren't bums like she thinks. Everything going all right. Joe is kind of jumpy though. In Pottstown, for instance. We were playing *New Baby* and one of those Bohunks puts his fingers in his ears and wags them like a jackass. Joe was all for going down and getting the guy, but Danny and me held him. Don't worry, honey. The reason the writing keeps jumping up and down this way is because I'm writing this on the bus. God, do I get tired riding this bus. And we aren't even to Pittsburgh yet. Well, that's the road for you. Give the baby a big kiss for me. All my love,

Your Bobby

PITTSBURGH, PA.

MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY 58 BROADWAY NEW YORK  
CITY THIS IS TO INFORM YOU BUS JUST RAN OVER MY

## LITTLE GATE

TRUMPET COMPLETELY RUINING SAME STOP DESIRE INSURANCE IMMEDIATELY CARE JOE GEDDES ORCHESTRA MUSIC MANAGEMENT CORPORATION CHICAGO STOP MY POLICY NUMBER 108743. CLEMENT JOHNS

Chicago, Illinois

Dear Frank,

The road is still no bed of roses, but thank God for Chicago where you can at least sleep in a real bed and get your shirts done! We're laying over here for two days as you already know. There's something I wanted to get off my chest. You know I've been doing this for a long time, Frank, and I'm not complaining. But other bands I went on the road with played stuff you could sell. Honest, Frank, I can't tell what tune this Geddes outfit is playing half the time. And the customers can't either.

I tell you this band stinks, Frank. If you're smart, you'll call them in. I told Geddes that last night and nearly got punched in the nose only I was quicker than he was. When you start getting wires from those guys farther out west, like Bogart, screaming to have this Geddes bunch jerked out of their places because they are poison to business, don't say I didn't warn you. Just wanted to put this in writing so you can't say I didn't warn you. Not that you'd throw it up to me, but you know what I mean. I'm not looking forward to Des Moines.

Yours truly,

BILL MEREDITH

Des Moines, Iowa

Hi, Toots,

This is to prove to you that Danny Acosta never forgets a pretty leg. Also to inform you that what you wrote me that bass player told you is a dirty lie. I was never married in my life and if I was, it wouldn't be to any hash slinger. It may also interest you to know that I almost got fired for showing up so late on the job that last night in Chicago which, as you know, was all your fault. Joe wouldn't talk to me for a week. You can write me, if you want, care of

Joe Geddes band, General Delivery, St. Louis. If we last till St. Louis. Last night, you could of drove a Mac truck down the middle of the floor and not hurt a soul. Don't take any wooden nickels or wooden bass players till I get back to Chicago which may be soon.

Your boy friend Danny

ST. LOUIS, MO.

FRANK MILLER MUSIC MANAGEMENT CORPORATION 700  
FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY FOR GOD'S SAKE WIRE NAME  
LAWYER YOU KNOW IN ST. LOUIS STOP TONY JACOBY'S WIFE  
SHOWED UP LAST NIGHT WANTING ALIMONY STOP MUST GET  
HIM OUT OF JAIL FOR TONIGHT STOP I'M GOING NUTS HOPE  
YOU ARE THE SAME STOP JOE

But Denver was the worst place they had struck yet. They played a place called Riverview Park, a long, low wooden pavilion that was hung with Japanese lanterns. It was a week's stand and Monday night the crowd was pretty good. It was a crowd that made a lot of requests for slow tunes and waltzes and Spanish or Mexican things. When Joe turned them down, they were sullen. He was not able to make any compromise between what he wanted and what they wanted. Tuesday night the crowd had fallen off some. By Wednesday, there were not more than a hundred people on the floor. What had been indifference before was now almost open hostility. There was an active unfriendliness lying between the stand and the floor and it acted like a smoke screen on the men.

After the set with *New Baby* in it was over, a couple of kids came up. Irene had seen them over in a dim corner, away from the lights, trying to do a little discreet necking. You couldn't do much necking to Joe's music.

"Please play a waltz, mister," the boy said.

Joe turned his head toward the kid in a distracted kind of way.

"We don't play waltzes, kid. Sorry," he said, and walked



over to where she sat on the side of the stand for a smoke. She talked to Joe idly, as usual, but she watched out of the corner of her eye and she saw the kids go away and pretty soon she saw them leave with about a dozen other kids. She saw Bogart, who owned the place, too, standing in the back where the tickets were sold. He was a tall, rangy man in a soiled white linen suit and a navy blue shirt. He wore a panama hat shoved back on his thick, bunchy hair. The kids said something to him as they went out. They laughed as they said it, but Mr. Bogart scowled. Then Mr. Bogart turned and walked out of the place.

"Oh, dear God," Irene thought to herself. "Don't let him phone New York and cancel us out. Joe will die if he phones New York and cancels us out."

She kept praying the rest of Wednesday night. She kept praying that Bogart wouldn't come back and say they were through. She kept telling herself Frank wouldn't stand for it. She stood up and she sang: "I can't give you anything but love, baby . . ." (Don't let him call New York!) "That's the only thing I've plenty of, baby . . . (Where can he be if he's not out calling New York?) . . . "Gee, I'd like to see you looking swell, baby . . ." (Not back yet . . . don't let him come back!) . . . "I can't give you anything but love. . . ."

He didn't come back. Not by one o'clock when they finished and the boys started packing up the instruments and stretching and yawning and getting ready to go. Joe was talking earnestly with Danny, back by the drums, about the second chorus of *New Baby* when she went over to him.

"Ready, Joe?"

"Uh-huh . . . wait a minute."

"Oh, go on," said Danny, his big puffiness slumped in his chair. "I know I muffed it. I'm sorry, Joe. I'm punchy, I guess. Go on out with Irene and get yourself some air. If I see another Japanese lantern, I'll vomit!"

She pulled Joe away and they took a streetcar back to the hotel in the nice, clean Denver air.

"Tired, Joe?" she said over the lonesome clang of the wheels on the tracks. They had the car nearly to themselves.

"So-so," he said, and she could see he wasn't listening. Did he see Bogart, too? Oh, please, don't let him have seen Bogart, too.

Silence.

"There's Pike's Peak, Joe."

"Huh? Oh, yeah. Hiya, Pike's Peak. Hey, are you kidding? You can't see Pike's Peak from here."

"You can't? I must be seeing things."

It wasn't much good as conversation and he didn't laugh.

"Listen," he said, "why do they listen as if the music was a train going by on another track?"

"It takes time, Joe. It takes time. A band as good as yours you have to hear more."

"They been hearing us since Monday. They been there, anyhow. Or some of them have been there anyhow."

Oh, God, *had* he seen Bogart leave then?

"Hey! Here's our stop."

They got off and went into the hotel. At his door, he stopped and said, "Well, g'night." She put her arms around his waist and raised her face and suddenly he was holding her very tight and he was shaking. "Damn them!" he said into her hair. "Damn them! Damn them! Damn them!" And then he went inside quickly and closed his door.

By putting her feet carefully in front of her one at a time, she got to her own room down the hall and went in and sat on the bed.

"I can't stand it," she said to herself, out loud and tonelessly. "I can't stand it." She pounded the pillow three times. It made a hole like the mark of a head, and she put her face in it and felt the linen cool against her cheeks and nose. He's in there, she said to the pillow, sitting and looking the way he looks when he's mad and discouraged and helpless, with that pulled-down look on his face. And I can't go and be with him. Not on the road, he said. It might look funny

on the road, he said. What kind of thing is this anyhow that you can't stay with him on the road when he needs you? Is this something you put on and take off—on in New York, off on the road?—when you need something you can wear all the time, wear next to your skin. Something to wear next to your skin like a stocking or a garter belt or a locket or a ring. Or a marriage. Why, of course, that was it! A marriage. She and Joe ought to get married. Well, for heaven's sake, it was as simple as that!

She got up from the bed to go and tell him. She got up suddenly, alive with this remarkable new idea. And then she sat down again. No, not tonight. She sat down and she thought of Bogart. Him and his panama hat and his linen suit with the dark shirt. Him and his scowl. Him and his phone call to New York.

She kicked off her shoes and picked up the receiver.

"Get me Frank Linder," she said, "in New York. He lives on East 79th Street."

While she waited, the twin ideas of Joe as—well, as Joe, and of Joe as her husband looked at each other in her mind. A third idea of Joe as harassed and worried and mad and discouraged managed to get into her mind, too, and none of them was making much sense there in uneasy community when she heard the sputters on the wire that were Frank saying, "What? Not again?" Then she knew Bogart had called.

"Listen, Frank," she said urgently and low, as if Joe were in the next room, "I want you to call Joe right away—no, not right away, tomorrow morning, say, not too early. He's—well, he's pretty broken up with the way the tour is going and I think if you called and gave him one of your good old pep talks he might feel better."

"What's he got to worry about?" Frank's voice sounded thin and far away. "You're going into L.A. next week. The Palomar."

"The Palomar?"

"That's what I said. Just sit tight and everything will be all right."

"That's easy for you to say. It's awful here in Denver. The kids ask for waltzes and—well, you know how Joe is about waltzes. That Bogart called you tonight, didn't he?"

"Sure, he called me. He's never liked a band yet that I put in his place. He's always calling me."

"What?"

"I said he kicks about every band I ever put in there. He's a plain crank, that Bogart."

"Oh, I see . . . but Frank . . ."

"Yes, yes. Come on, what is it? You know it's darned near morning here in New York, don't you? And the bags under my eyes are hanging down to my knees with all this telephoning all night. What do you want?"

"You *will* phone Joe tomorrow and kind of bolster him up, though, won't you?"

"Oh, sure, sure. I've got the habit now. I'll just keep talking to Denver the rest of the week. Sure, I'll talk to him tomorrow."

"You're the one he'll listen to. And . . . Frank, I—"

"Hello . . . hello . . . where are you?"

"I'm here. I—look, Frank, I'm considering asking Joe to marry me tomorrow. Is that a good idea?"

"Asking Joe to what?"

"To marry me, I said. Don't you think it's about time?"

"Oh, *marry*! For God's sake! Sure, great idea. But not tomorrow. Let it ride a while, won't you? He's got enough on his mind right now. I'll do what I can with him tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay! Okay, Frank, and thanks."

She hung up and sat looking at the neat little desk on which the phone stood. What was so odd to everybody about the idea of getting married, for heaven's sake? She *wanted* to be married to Joe. Not any cottage small by a waterfall. That wasn't for her and Joe. Just an anchor to put down

somewhere so you weren't always being blown around hither and thither the way you were in this business anyway, no matter what you were. Just something to wear next to your skin.

Yes, that was the thing. They'd get married. She felt very happy and peaceful now and she sat down and wrote a long letter to her sister on the neat little desk on which the phone stood. She wrote a letter to Elaine Freeman, too, feeling tender and godmotherly about the baby. She was wide-awake and satisfied and communicative and she wanted somebody else to write to. So she picked up a post card with a picture of Pike's Peak on it, that the management had kindly provided, and she wrote on the back, "Dear Bo, This is a picture of Pike's Peak which I should be able to see from my window, but can't. I am well and happy and hope you are the same. Give my love to Mulrooney's. Irene Jaynes."

Then she went to bed and to sleep.

## Chapter XVI

NEXT MORNING, THE PHONE WOKE JOE Geddes at ten o'clock. He hadn't been able to get to sleep till nearly five, and had left word at the desk that he didn't want to be disturbed till noon. So he was irritable as he picked up the receiver.

"Listen, I thought I told you not to ring this phone," he said.

"New York calling," said the operator. Then Frank's thin, nervous voice came over the wire.

"Hiya, Joe," Frank said.

"What's up?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"What's the idea of the long distance call then? Couldn't you get Bill?"

"I didn't want to talk to Bill. I wanted to talk to you."

"Why, Frank, I didn't know you cared."

"Shut up, wise guy. What makes you have to be so insulting? I hear you're insulting to the customers, too. They got a right to talk, you know. They even got a right not to like you they want to be that dumb."

"Who's been talking to you? Bill? Or maybe that Bogart guy? Or no . . . wait . . . has Irene been running to you?"

"Never mind, Joe. By the way, you see Irene yet this morning?"

"No. I'm not even up yet. Come on, now, who's been buzzing in your ear?"

"Oh? Well, good. Nobody's been buzzing in my ear. Of course, Bogart did want to cancel you, but I talked him out of it."

Through the window by his bed, Joe could see the clear, western morning sky. It was so blithe, so innocent, so childishly blue that he could not bear the sight of it. One frothy, whipped-cream cloud floated needlessly by. Joe pulled down the shade with a jerk, shutting out that cheery sky.

"Listen, Frank," he said through his dry lips, "I'm through on this job. It was a lousy idea in the first place and I'm lousy at it. We play the best damned music we know how to play and nobody gives a single human damn. They don't even listen, Frank. They look at us as if we were something out of the jungle. Or the sewer. Or the woodwork. Listen, Frank, the boys are swell. You know that. We're better than we were when we left New York. But nobody gets it."

"You gotta be patient, Joe. You gotta—"

"Ya! Ya! Ya! Patient! The great man sits in New York and talks to me about patience. I gotta be patient, he says. You don't have to face them every night. You don't have to look at their hard, nasty, unhearing faces. You don't have to blow your lungs out for them and watch them put their fingers in their ears. You don't have to watch them walk off the floor. It's no good, I tell you, Frank. Last night was the payoff. Bogart doesn't need to cancel us. We'll cancel all right. We'll cancel right now!"

Frank told him, oh, no, he wouldn't, Frank told him to get the hell into Los Angeles as soon as the week was up. Not only was he booked into the Palomar, Frank told him, but they had word that at least two of his records—one of them *I Found a New Baby*—were terrific on the Coast. Frank talked to Joe for forty minutes. When he had hung up, Joe lay back on the bed in which he had tossed and turned and twisted all night. He lay there a long time, thinking about the things Frank had said—schoolboy things, some of them, about not giving up, about believing in himself and giving the music a chance and taking it easy and not getting people sore at him for nothing.

When Irene called about dinner, he was ready. He was

very sober and quiet and Irene found, suddenly, to her dismay, that she was in awe of this sober and quiet Joe. He seemed older and sterner, yet gentler, somehow. Remote, somehow. Not remote the way he often seemed, going off in the music but all right when he came back to her. Remote now in himself. Remote from her. Frank was right about the marriage thing. It would have to wait. It would have to wait for now anyhow.

On the stand at Riverview Park in Denver that night, Joe was sober and quiet, too. He had the boys tone the music down a lot. He no longer felt belligerent. He felt only a warm, slow hope that Frank Linder had built in his mind with the words he had said over the phone. Joe carried that hope in his head, carefully, not paying attention to anything else for fear the hope of Frank's words would get crowded out and go away. He carried the hope in his head, carefully, the way Mexican women balanced those jars in travel movies, holding the head steady and quiet, not daring to move much one way or the other or the jar would tumble and crash. Or the hope would tumble and crash. He went around that way the rest of the week in Denver. He did not believe in the hope, but he felt it. He clung to it. He went into the Palomar Ball Room in Los Angeles with the tentative approach of a man walking on water in a dream.

The Palomar in Los Angeles was a long, white, low building. It was a very famous place for bands to play and many very famous bands had played there. It had a clientele of kids who knew their dance music, who gave enthusiastic support to their favorites, and who insulted bands they did not like with youthful cruelty. Joe was afraid of these kids. Yet, when he stepped up on the Palomar bandstand that August night, and looked out at them—so young and hard and eager—he thought they looked different from the kids in Pittsburgh and Des Moines and Denver. Not any friendlier, but different. More sophisticated, maybe, wiser, more alive. He had added two waltzes and two tangos to the books,



though, and he was going to try to please them. He was going to play it the way Frank said—plenty of easy ones with only an occasional roof-ripper. Only an occasional “killer diller,” as the expression went.

They began quietly that first night at the Palomar with a run-of-the-mill arrangement of *Sweet Sue*. After a while, several kids came up and stood below the stand, looking at the band in a puzzled way. They whispered among themselves and one tall boy with glasses and tousled hair kept making gestures to his girl with the hand he was not using to guide her carelessly along the floor. This boy had red hair and a palish face and Joe had him doped for the waltz type. Joe wondered why he didn't make a request, he hung around so close. Finally Joe leaned down and said, “Something special, kid?” He was playing it the way Frank had said.

The red-headed boy blushed. His girl, who reached to his lanky shoulder and whose soft blonde hair was tied back with a little blue ribbon, was the one who spoke up.

“Hank thinks there's something the matter, Mr. Geddes,” she said.

“Something the matter?”

Joe didn't get it till Hank said, “We're waiting for you to play *I Found a New Baby*, Mr. Geddes,” he said, “the way you play it on the record.”

“*I Found a New Baby*?” Joe said, rather stupidly.

“We were sure you were the one made the record. Aren't you?”

“Well, sure. We made a record of it.”

“Well, would you play it for us now, so we can tell if you're the one?”

Would he? Would Joe Geddes play *I Found a New Baby* hard and loud and terrific? The way they played it on the record? For these two kids who, out of the whole country, seemed to be his audience? He whispered *New Baby*, waited till the boys found it in the books—as if they needed to

find it in the books!—and then gave them the downbeat. As soon as they started to play, there was a general movement towards the stand. Kids stopped dancing to listen. They clapped. They clapped even before Joe got to his own clarinet solo. They *knew* the solo, knew where it came on the record. They knew Johnny's solo, too, and they clapped for that. Johnny ducked when he had finished his solo, but he was pleased and grinning because they clapped. Joe looked over at the red-headed boy. He was nodding his head vigorously in time to the music, and he put his hands over his head and gripped them together in a kind of salute. Joe put his hands over his head, too, and gripped them together, in a kind of salute back at the kid, hugging the clarinet close to his sides with his arms to do it. Joe loved the red-headed kid.

They played *King Porter* and *Blue Skies* and *I Know That You Know* and the crowd loved it. Irene sang *Careless Love* and *Basin Street* and *I Can't Give You Anything but Love, Baby* and they loved that, too. Warmth and vitality flowed between the stand and the floor, friendliness and appreciation and understanding. The band had never played so well. The music licked across the floor like a flame, a thing of sparks and light and heat.

All of them stood around afterwards, looking pleased and awkward because the kids were asking for autographs—asking Johnny and Danny and Bobby, too, not just Joe and Irene. All of them seemed to be just coming back to life again after a long sleep. But when the last kid was gone and the lights were out, the boys let Irene and Joe go off by themselves to celebrate.

They turned into the first lighted place they found, walking in a daze away from the Palomar. It was just one of those places where you can eat and drink at night in any American town where you can eat and drink at night. There were booths along the wall and they sank into one of them. Joe was excited now, not quiet and sober. He was excited

and unable to unwind. Irene didn't blame him. She didn't even say much. She knew. She could tell.

"Listen," he said, over his fourth Scotch. "Imagine coming all the way out here to find them. You see the way they listened? They *knew*, honey. They knew it was good. You notice they didn't even dance some of the time. Just stood and listened. Why, some of them hardly even moved!"

"Looks like you're in, Joe," Irene said. Hey, that was funny. Why didn't she say, "Looks like *we're* in, Joe." She was excited, too, but not the way Joe was. She had a queer, apprehensive feeling.

"Of course, it's only the one night," he said.

"No, I think it's more than one night, Joe. I think this is it. I think you're in, Joe." There it was again. "You're in, Joe." Well, that was the way she saw it.

He put his head down quickly on the table and she thought there were tears in his eyes. Her heart was glad to see him happy, but her heart was frightened, too. It seemed too big all of a sudden—too big and too strong and too all-of-a-sudden. Like something you couldn't control. Something that was going to make a big difference in your life and that you couldn't control. She waited a minute, and then she touched his arm and said, "Joe . . ."

He raised his head. They were tears in his eyes all right.

"Joe," she said, "there's something I've been wanting to tell you for a while."

"What is it, honey?"

It was silly that it was so hard to say. She'd waited a long time and she'd thought about it a lot. It wasn't that she was afraid of him. He wasn't remote from her now. He was happy and successful and close to her and she wasn't afraid of him. What was it then? Her stumbling mind found the word. She was shy. Irene Jaynes was shy about talking to Joe Geddes!

"Honey, what is it?"

She said it all in a heap.

"Joe, I want us to get married."

"Married?"

"Yes, married. You know, the popular institution of the same name. Man and wife stuff." It was better now she had said it. She felt better now.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said.

"What do you mean, you'll be damned. Is there a law against it?"

"I didn't mean that, honey. I just never thought about it, I guess. I mean, I thought . . ."

"Joe, don't you want to marry me? Don't you love me?"

That sounded like a fool. Like a schoolgirl. But he moved over and put his arm around her.

"You know I love you," he said. "Listen, I couldn't even—why, I couldn't even breathe if you weren't here. I couldn't even *play*, I don't think, if you weren't here."

She put her head on his shoulder. She was very happy.

"But marriage," he went on. "I just never connected the two of them together."

"Joe, you're hopeless."

"I always figured I thought more of you than most men think of their wives, I guess. I mean I never thought about you like a wife."

"Don't start telling me you love me too much to marry me!"

"You know how much I love you. I don't know what it's got to do with marriage, though."

"Joe, you *are* hopeless! Look, Joe—"

"Listen, you're not thinking of quitting the band, are you?"

"I hadn't thought about it. I don't see why I should, at first, anyhow. Maybe, if we had a kid, I'd have to."

"A kid? Say, what goes on here?"

"Look, Joe. Maybe I'm going female on you. I don't know. Maybe I'm just growing up. I'm twenty-nine, remember. I don't know. I just know you're my man and I think it's a

good thing to marry your man and have his kids. Particularly when there's nothing to prevent it."

"Well, I'll be god-damned!"

"You said that before, Joe. Joe, I'm very serious about this. I've been thinking about it a long time. I didn't want to spring it on you when you were worried about the band and the job and everything. But now I don't think there's anything else to worry about. You saw the kids tonight. You're set. But you're going to go up in smoke if you don't throw out some kind of anchor. Joe, I know what I'm talking about. You may even get to be famous and make a lot of money and get so tied up in knots that we won't be so important to each other."

He was looking at her very attentively now and listening carefully to what she said. "How do you fit your sister Claire and Will into this picture? Will is famous and makes a lot of money and it doesn't seem to make any difference to him and Claire."

"Will isn't famous the way you're going to be famous, Joe. I know it. I know it and I feel it. I feel that maybe you'll get to be famous in a way that will interfere with us, not like Will and Claire. It would be fine, I think, like Will and Claire. But you're different. You're—I don't know what I mean, Joe. Yes, I guess I do, too. Will isn't really a musician. He's—well, he's part musician, but mostly businessman. You're—Joe, do you know what you are? You're an artist. Oh, not like they say vaudeville artists. Or guest artists on radio programs. But like they say artists when they mean people who make something new—something—I don't know. They *create* something!"

She stopped, worn out.

"You're crazy! Just because the job goes good. But I love you, honey. I love you, crazy or not. I even love you more when I'm happy like this."

"I'm glad, Joe. I'm very glad. I love you, too, more all the time. But I don't want it to be something to just put

on and take off. I want it to be something I wear next to my skin."

"That's a funny way to talk. You're a funny girl, honey."

He was genuinely puzzled. It was not easy for him to absorb a new, non-musical idea. He was not aware how truly he spoke when he said he thought more of Irene than most men thought of their wives. He did not realize himself how strongly his idea of marriage had been shaped by the only marriage he had ever really seen in operation—that of his mother and father. It had never occurred to him that his father loved his mother. But he was married to her. He loved Irene, but he was not married to her. Love was something that had nothing to do with marriage in his mind. Marriage was something that he shied away from in his mind. Irene did not see it this clearly, but she understood that the idea of marriage as a way of life was completely foreign to him. It had, until very recently, been foreign to her, too, but not for the same reasons. She had loved her freedom, and she had not been brought up with the idea that marriage should be the inevitable aim of a girl's life. Grow up and work at something for a while until you got married and then you wouldn't have to work any more. No, she had not been brought up that way. In the only marriage she had ever really seen in operation—Claire's and Will's—it had been a natural development and it had had to do, properly, she thought, with the people concerned and not with the institution.

"I want you to think about it, Joe," she said.

"Honey, I will. I don't see why not—only . . ."

"Only what? Joe, are you turning down my proposal of marriage?"

She tried to make it a laugh, but it came out rather sob-like. He gathered her in his arms all in a heap, to the astonishment of the waiter who had just appeared, leaning his long white apron across their table to see if they were ready for another drink. Joe waved him away.

"Honey, baby, Irene! Don't talk like that! If you want me to say it, I will. Honey, will you marry me?"

The waiter went a long ways away. He knew he wasn't wanted.

When they sat apart again, Irene said, "You didn't even wait to hear whether I'd have you or not! Shows you what girls are coming to these days." This time she was able to make it a laugh. She felt like laughing.

"I can't make it real in my mind," he said. "Me. Married."

"We could wait till we got back to New York," she said and she sounded pretty offhanded about it. She was very busy with her hair that was mussed up and her lipstick that was smeared. "We couldn't do anything about it till we got back to New York anyhow probably."

"Okay. Let's do that. Let's get married when we get back to New York."

That's the way they left it.

At the end of the week, they got the call from Frank, telling them they were booked into the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York City and Joe better get the hell back as fast as he could. Joe better take the train.

## *Chapter XVII*

JOE GEDDES WAS IN, ALL RIGHT—AND IT was not only the records, which were terrific now in more places than the West Coast. Nor was it only the hotel, where they had to put up ropes to hold back the crowds that were beginning to throng there to hear Joe Geddes' band. The next Spring, Frank put them in the Paramount Theater in New York and got them their first radio contract.

Neither Joe nor Irene could believe what they saw in the Paramount Theater the day they opened. Kids began to collect at Broadway and 44th Street at 4 A.M. They built bonfires in the street to keep themselves warm and they brought their lunches. Frank had told them about this in advance, so, when the band came out on the stage for the first show, they were prepared for enthusiasm. They were not prepared for what happened.

The kids started to dance, trucking and shagging in the aisles. Ushers had to dash about, trying to get kids back in their seats. Finally, one boy tossed his partner up on the stage. Others followed. Irene looked beseechingly at Joe, who grabbed the mike and retreated with her to a spot beside Danny Acosta's drums.

"Say something! Do something!" Irene said in a panic.

"What can you do? They're slaphappy!"

He went up front again and tried to announce the next number, but two youngsters lindied right into him and he moved back to the reed section and finished the show from there. When the lights went off, all of them left the stage in a hurry and beat it for their dressing rooms. The picture was already on, but the ushers still hadn't managed to get all the kids cleared off the stage.



"They got an ambulance outside," the elevator man told Joe, taking them up. "Three girls fainted out front. Never saw anything like it!"

"Geez!" said Joe. He was sweating, but his eyes were bright with excitement and he squeezed Irene's hand spasmodically as she stood beside him. Under her make-up, she could feel her bloodless cheeks stretched tight over her clenched teeth.

"It's awful! Can't we do something?" she said.

He shook his head, still dazed at this demonstration for *him*, for his music. The boys were offhanded and full of wisecracks, but their hands were a little unsteady, lighting cigarettes, and it wasn't because it was eleven o'clock in the morning either. This was working under a strain that wouldn't let up.

"The Four Square was quieter than this, huh, Joe?" said Danny lazily, a cue for the others to chime in.

"Bunch of nuts. Whadda they wanta knock themselves out for?"

"This happens every show, I'm gonna get myself some shock absorbers for my horn!"

"Or a shotgun . . ."

"Water pistol, you mean . . ."

"Or a pantywaist patrol . . ."

She and Joe got off at the fourth floor and went towards their dressing rooms. His face looked drawn and tired already, after their first show. How was he going to do five shows a day? Or more?

"You better go lie down, Joe."

"Yeah. Say, they like us, don't they?"

"Like us? They'll kill us, liking us that way!"

"Wouldn't you rather have them like this than like—well, Denver, say?"

"I guess so, Joe. I don't know. Five times a day . . . and you look awful already."

"Aw, pull yourself together, honey. We put a lot of hard work into this, remember? Let's enjoy it, huh?"

"Enjoy it?"

He put his arms around her and kissed her. Then he gave her a little push into her dressing room.

"You'll get used to it, baby."

When she got inside, the phone was ringing.

"Miss Jaynes, there's a lot of flowers down here for you. Shall I send them up?"

"Flowers? Oh, sure. Sure, send them up."

There were a dozen boxes of them. Gardenias. Fresh and white and fragrant. She buried her face in each box and let their petal-fingers soothe her hot cheeks and pounding head. She lined them up on her make-up shelf and looked for the card. It said: "Congratulations and best wishes for success. Bo Lashky."

She picked up the phone, smiling a little, and asked the operator to get her Mike Provo's office.

"Is Mr. Lashky there?"

"No, ma'am, he ain't. Who's calling?"

"Will you give him a message, please? Tell him Miss Jaynes called and said thanks. He'll know."

"Thanks from Miss Jaynes. Okay, miss. I'll tell him."

Her long white dress was feeling very hot and tight around her waist. She changed quickly and ran out to the dime store where she bought flat pie tins to put them in. A dozen flat pie tins, spread out on her make-up table, filled with gardenias.

That was the way it began at the Paramount. That was their initiation to the hysteria that was beginning to grow where they had planted the seeds for success. Who could have foreseen that kind of furor? The new language in which Joe's music was called "swing," "gutbucket," "rideout," "jive"? In which his clarinet was a "licorice stick"? And Jake's trombone was a "slip horn"? And Danny's drums "skins" or "hides"? Those who liked the music were "cats" or "alligators." Those who didn't were "ickies." Music that wasn't "swing" was "schmaltz." It got so that even the musicians didn't know what the kids were talking about.

Who could have foreseen the stuff that would be written about him? Writers who didn't know a four beat from a dry Manhattan fell over themselves trying to describe the new musical religion. And Joe Geddes, its Messiah. Joe's birthplace was reported to be Chicago, Davenport, St. Joseph, Missouri, New Orleans. His father was said to be a piano player, a saloonkeeper, a manufacturer of orthopedic appliances, a tailor. It was written that he secured his first saxophone from a mail-order house, from a church band, from an old-time jazz musician on his deathbed. He was variously an orphan, the oldest of a family of six, the youngest of two sets of twins. He was a bachelor . . . secretly married . . . about to be divorced. Writers who had never given a hoot about music, and didn't now as they pounded their typewriters, produced long articles on the history of swing, its stars, its significance. Was it a new American art form? Yes! No! Definitely! Certainly *not*!

It started that week at the Paramount and, by Sunday, Irene didn't know if she was a singer or a circus barker. She wondered just exactly what this hysteria had to do with success. Or with the music.

On Sunday, Bo Lashky called.

"Got your message," he said. "Sorry I couldn't get back to you sooner. Had a fight in Newark. Just got back today."

"That's okay, Bo. I only wanted to thank you for the flowers. They're lovely. They're so lovely and cool and sane in this madhouse. How did you know we were opening here?"

"Could hardly have missed it—in all the papers. Wanted to let you know how glad I was it worked out okay for you. Congratulations!"

"Well, thanks, I think."

"Whaddayou mean, you think? Remember how tough it was—at Mulrooney's? And now it's okay. Bet Joe is sitting on top of the world!"

"He is. Joe's fine. He's eating it up. But, you know, Bo,

this isn't playing a job. This is overcoming a handicap. This is—well, it's like trying to work inside of an electric fan. I don't know if I like working like this, Bo."

She heard the low growl that told her he was laughing at the other end of the wire.

"Hey," he said, "you're edgy. How about an idea like this? Why don't I come down there, fight my way through the mob they say is always outside the stage door, and take you out for a little air? Between shows. Got a car of my own now. How about that?"

He sounded pleased and concerned about her. He sounded sure of himself, too, and the idea of getting out of the theater, away from the theater altogether, was very tempting the way he put it.

"Why, I think that's a wonderful idea!" she said.

"Good! What time?"

"Just before the supper show, say. Wait till I look at the schedule. . . . Four-thirty be okay?"

"Four-thirty will be fine."

When she came off the stage after the third show, he was already there. He had sent back a note to say he was waiting downstairs. He wouldn't come up. Could she change fast and come down? Outside, he put his big arm around her and tried to get her past the crowd on the sidewalk. Not a chance. "Where's Joe?" the kids called out. "Danny in there?" "When's Johnny coming out?" "Can I have your autograph, Miss Jaynes?"

"I'll run you interference if you like," Bo said.

"No, I'll have to sign. Frank says it's very bad if you turn them down. Joe says so, too."

So she stood and signed books, and programs, and envelopes and school notebooks. When they were driving west on 45th Street at last, she leaned back and took a deep breath.

"Want the top down?"

"That would be swell, Bo!"

He drove on to the West Side highway and they didn't say anything for a while. She was looking at the silver sheen of the Hudson, off to the left. A ferry crossed with slow dignity and a flat barge of coal stretched widely, being towed downstream.

"It's fine, Bo. It's like being on a ship, here in the sun with the wind blowing. I've never been on a ship, but I imagine it's like this. It's fine."

He turned briefly from the wheel to look at her.

"Good idea, wasn't it?"

"Wonderful. Now I'm getting used to it, I'll take a look at you. You look wonderful yourself."

He did. His suit fit him all over and so did his collar. It wasn't pinned together at his big throat any more. His hair was still cut very short and still curled softly at the ends and his big, strong, short-fingered hands held the wheel as if it were a child's hoop they happened to find in them. He wore a camel's hair coat, too. Not a baggy one, with a belt. A loose one, soft and brown. Just a camel's hair coat, not a Broadway wrapper.

"You look like Joe College," she said.

"Sure," he said back easily. "I got on my college clothes."

"Oh, Bo, don't tell me you want to look like those kids at the theater!"

"They're not college. They're high school. But I mean the other. Wasn't even going to say anything about it. But since you bring it up, might as well tell you. Starting to college this fall."

"Bo, you're kidding!"

"Nope. Quitting the fight racket, like I always said I would. Only stayed in it for the dough. Got the dough now."

"But what will you do—I mean what will Mike say? I mean, gee, how can you quit? I hear the boys—Danny and Johnny and the rest—talk about you and they say you're championship material. You're a celebrity—like us."

"Sports writers say I'm champ stuff. I'm a good fighter.

Sure. Mike's sore at me. Sure. Sees a good income getting away from him. I got other plans."

"What other plans, Bo?"

She remembered now. She remembered now that she had always half-believed him when he talked about it at Mulrooney's. He was the kind of guy you did believe. Even when his mouth was relaxed and smiling like now, the cheekbones stood out with that strong look, and the chin was a chin that could set in a stubborn line when the mouth wasn't relaxed and smiling like now.

They were past the toll bridge, past the smooth highway, on a little side road where Bo had pulled up and stopped.

"Really want to know?" he said, turning towards her and getting out cigarettes for them both.

"Of course I want to know. Who has a better right? After all, we sat it out together in Mulrooney's a couple of years ago."

"Year and three months ago," he said.

He slouched in the seat, inhaled deeply, and rubbed his head and his back against the leather. Then he let the smoke trickle out through his nostrils and took a deep breath of just plain air.

"Guess everybody brought up in dirty cities gets a kick out of fresh air. I—"

"You wriggle in it like a dog in green grass. I feel like that, too—just getting out of that theater. But you were going to tell about your plans."

"Oh, that. Okay. If you really want to know. Remember, I told you about the mills. About my old man that got hurt in them and never walked since. I never understood much about it at the time. Left school and went to work. About all I ever thought about it then. Remember my sisters I told you about?"

He looked at her and she nodded. She was impressed with this straightforward way of talking about your life, as if you thought about it. And she was impressed with this life that

had sharp things in it, like getting hurt in a steel mill and not being able to walk. She had never known anybody who couldn't walk.

"Well, one of the kids—Janicka, it was—married this guy from the mill. Got married when I was out there last winter. I was best man. Won my fight and went along to the wedding afterwards and was best man. What a party! When us Slovaks put on a party, it's something!"

"I bet," she said in the little pause he left while he remembered the party. He crushed out his cigarette, reached for hers, and crushed it out, too, in the tray on the dash.

"Make a long story short, this guy that Janicka married keeps asking about the old man. First guy that ever bothered. Did the company give him any compensation, this guy wants to know. Did we have a lawyer? Hell, no. Never thought about it. Company gave Mom couple hundred bucks or something. Never figured you could do anything about it. Hey—boring you?"

She shook her head. "Just keep an eye on the time, though."

"Say, that's right. Better start back. Only about half an hour out, though. We'll make it."

"But go ahead. You still haven't told me about your plans."

"Not much to it. Talked a lot to this guy Janicka married. Took a week off last summer and went home. Never thought I'd go back and look up guys I used to work with in the mill. But I did, with this guy Janicka married. Different now in the mill. Got this steel workers' union. All of them talking about a strike in Youngstown, you know. Or no. You wouldn't. Anyhow, talked about it a lot."

"Well, for heaven's sake, what's that got to do with your Dad? And you."

"Oh, yeah, that. Say, I don't know what I'm telling you all this for."

"You're taking my mind off that mob back at the theater, remember?"

He growled his laugh at her, sideways.

"Okay. Well, here's the last lap. Way I figured it, if anybody knew how to fight for my old man when he got hurt, maybe he would of got some decent help to make up for him losing the use of his legs. What's the score on that stuff? What goes on? Well, anyhow, I decided to study law."

"Law!"

"Uh-huh."

If he'd said he was going to study astronomy, it couldn't have been more unreal. She looked at him hard. She tried to see him in a classroom. She tried to see him talking the way she'd seen Joe's lawyer talking to Frank over a contract.

"Well, for heaven's sake!" she said.

"Have to tutor for a while first, they tell me."

"Bo, I can't believe it!"

"Never meant to stay in the fight racket anyhow. Took me a while though to see exactly what to do when I quit it."

They were coming back into town now and the Spring twilight was shaking soft blue dust over the river and the apartment houses on Riverside Drive.

"Look, Bo. I really do wish you all the luck in the world."

"Thanks. Wish you luck, too."

"Hey, what time is it? We're on again about six-fifteen or so. Joe'll be screaming his head off if I don't get there."

"Plenty of time. Say, like to see Joe, too. Maybe we could all run up to the country some afternoon."

"I don't see why not. Only he's always got somebody coming backstage to interview him or see him about a song or something. He's looking tired and haggard these days because he's working too hard. I'm worried about him—kind of. Hey! There he is!"

They had to draw up to the curb slowly, and, even then, kids piled all over the car. Joe was trying to fight his way into the theater, so they went alongside him to keep him from being mauled to death.

"It sure is handy to have a prize fighter around," Irene



laughed up at Bo, as he steered the two of them in the door and got it shut while young voices clamored outside.

"Whew!" said Joe. "Thanks, pal."

"Look, Joe, it's Bo Lashky."

"Well, for Pete's sake. How are you, guy? When did you get back?"

"This week. Congratulations on a riot!"

"They're really dizzy, those kids. Well . . . what time is it?"

"I'll blow now," Bo said. "Swell, Irene. Some other time?"

"Sure, Bo. Thanks. Call me, huh?"

She and Joe got on the elevator.

"Hell!" he said. "We only got fifteen minutes. You better dress fast."

"Uh-huh. Doesn't Bo the Mo look swell? He's going to college!"

"College! And wind up like those kids out there!"

"They're not college. They're high school. He's going to study law."

"Hey, is that who that guy was—Bo the Mo?"

"Sure. Bo Lashky, the fighter used to hang around Mulrooney's. He took me out for some air. You sure look as if you could stand some air, Joe. Do you feel all right?"

The elevator stopped at their floor.

"I'm okay. Better get dressed. We're due . . ."

"Joe, will you come along and get some fresh air with us one of these days. . . ."

Her words dribbled away behind him.

"You only got twelve minutes, kid," he called back from the door of his dressing room.

The radio was not like the theater. Just a sound-proofed studio for the audition and the few kids who always seemed to know where they were, hanging around outside the broadcasting building. The kids that were beginning to follow Joe around now every place he went.

She got there a little late, and, when she came in, she saw Joe playing with a tall man the color of shiny bitter chocolate and a wide-shouldered man the color of pale cinnamon. Drums and guitar and clarinet. What they played had the delicate urgency of things not quite remembered, a hot, sharp outline like the branches of pine trees burned, from which the flame, but not the heat, has gone. The small group was a sensation in the studio. "Gives the show a pace that's sockeroo!" the production men said. "Sure fire!"

When they stopped playing, Irene went over to them.

"Fine pals," she said. "Hiding a thing like this under a barrel. Bushel, I mean."

"Like it?" But Joe wasn't asking to find out. He knew.

"So that's what you've been doing those nights you had to see Frank about the radio show?"

"It was Frank's idea actually," Joe said.

But Irene looked at Pug Johnson and Cozy Wilson, both of them looking at Joe with broad grins, and she knew whose idea it had been.

"What happened to your sax, Cozy?"

"Aw, I always liked guitar better."

"After all this time!" she said.

"Joey done all right for us," said Cozy.

But, however it happened, the trio was terrific. When the audition was over and the record was made, they were all tired and excited with the good feeling of something brand-new done well. They knew it was good.

That was a Tuesday afternoon. On Sunday, Joe came up to her place—an apartment hotel on the upper West Side. It was raining outside, but, instead of an umbrella, he had a bottle of champagne under each arm. The elevator boy came behind him, carrying a large, flat, expensive-looking white box, tied with wide, expensive-looking white satin ribbon, splattered with raindrops.

"Just put it anyplace," Joe told the boy with a nonchalance she could tell he didn't feel, and he gave the kid a dollar.

Then he handed her the champagne bottles. "The man said they have to be iced," he said. "Do I know how to ice champagne?"

"You put it in buckets, I think," she said carefully, not spoiling his act.

"Oh, the hell with it. Let's put it on the ice. Come on."

They went into the shiny white kitchen and put the champagne in the big, empty refrigerator.

"Doesn't look like anybody here eats much," he said, still elaborately casual.

"Musicians don't eat. You know that. Just munch old saxophone reeds."

"Yeah. I know. Tough."

He stood there, looking down at her with the suppressed satisfaction shining in his eyes, and holding the icebox door open. He sneezed. "Draught in here," he said, then, and closed the door as carefully as if it had been a safe. She couldn't wait any longer.

"Joe! You got it, you dope. Don't stand there like a dope. Show it to me!"

"Honest, lady, I wouldn't know what you were talking about if you wrote it down for me even. I—"

She grabbed him and began to reach for his pockets. He broke away from her and ran into the sedate living room and sat down on the chintz love seat and held the contract over his head. That pose didn't last long because the reason he had come was to show it to her first. So they spread it out on her knees and they spent an awed five minutes just looking at it.

"Joe! All that money!"

"You count it in hundreds," he said. "Not the usual way you count money—quarter, half, buck, fin, and like that. No, this kind of money you count in hundreds, starting with five."

"Want to go some place and celebrate, Joe?"

"I want to celebrate right here."

On her way to the kitchen to get the champagne, she bumped into the big white box.

"Hey, what's in the box?"

"Open it, for Pete's sake. It's for you."

"For *me*! Oh, listen to me. That's what girls always say. Joe, do you realize it's the first present you ever brought me?"

"How about all those boxes of candy?"

"Boxes of candy that the boys made you get because it was Christmas or something! I mean a real present—for no reason at all."

"Well, open it, why don't you?"

He stood and watched, pleased and embarrassed, while she lifted off the lid. When she pushed back the tissue paper, she caught her breath and couldn't speak and was just able to keep the tears from starting to her eyes.

"Joe! I've never seen anything so beautiful in my life!"

"Elaine picked it out. It's okay, isn't it? Put it on."

It was a mandarin coat of heavy black satin, stitched all over with metal thread—gold and silver and scarlet and purple and fern green. It shone with a detached brilliance, too deep and rich and solemn to shimmer or sparkle. He looked at her wearing it. "Gee, you're pretty," he said. "How about that champagne?"

When they were sitting at the kitchen table, with the second bottle of champagne between them, she said again, "Sure you don't want to go someplace and celebrate?"

"Hell, no! I feel too delicate to be out there where all those people are that aren't carrying around contracts like this in their pockets. I'd break if I bumped into any of those people."

"You're pale, Joe Geddes. Even flushed with champagne, you're pale. Your eyes are all bloodshot and you look ready to drop. Joe, you sure you feel all right?"

"I'm fine. I feel pale. Listen, when Frank brought those

contracts over this morning, I could hardly write my name, I felt so pale."

"That doesn't make sense. Being pale doesn't affect your handwriting!"

"Feeling pale does, though. It affected mine."

"Joe, I'm going to put you to bed. You never get enough sleep any more."

During the night, she wakened with a start from a dream. He was lying on his back, with his hands clasped under his head.

"All that champagne and I can't sleep," he said. "Feel hot and cold all over."

"I just had the strangest dream, Joe. I dreamed we were married."

"What's so strange about that?"

"I don't know. We weren't married actually. It was queer and terribly real. Listen, Joe. In this dream, I had lost my voice and I couldn't remember if I had asked you or not. So I wrote on a piece of paper: 'Say, Will you marry me?' And, as I wrote them, they became music. The words, I mean; and the boys began playing them. And then you picked up a long-stemmed flower, a kind of yellow lily, and began to play that and when you played it didn't come out like music, but like fragrance. Like gardenias. Strong. I was afraid then and went to a tiny round window and looked out and there were a lot of trees out there. One of them had bright red leaves, pointed like a poinsettia, and a black, black trunk like soot. It was so vivid, I can see it now."

"Sounds crazy," he said.

"I know. But it was so real."

"Do you believe in that stuff?"

"I don't know. Do you?"

"I don't know. Listen, would *King Porter* or *Farewell Blues* be better to start the first program off with?"

"*King Porter*. And we'll invite that Solly What's-His-Name. He didn't like *King Porter*. Remember?"

"Jesus, that seems a long time ago, doesn't it, baby?"

"Yes, it does. It is."

She knew that he was not evading her. And yet, uncertainty stirred and breathed its first small breath inside her that night. Later, she came to understand how it was that on this night the uncertainty did actually begin. It came to be associated in her mind with champagne and the dull sheen of metal thread and the smell of gardenias and a tree with scarlet leaves and sooty trunk. When she would try to say to herself, later, "I'm sure," the unbidden taste of champagne and the sheen of metal thread and the smell of gardenias and the colors of scarlet and black stirred in someplace in her stored memory. Not tasted or smelled or seen. Just there.

"Joe," she said now, quickly. "About getting married, not in a dream. Have you thought about that?"

"Funny thing. I've been so busy, it never entered my mind, all the time we've been back in New York. Till tonight. Just before you woke up, I was thinking about it. And the contract and the show, too, of course."

"Yes, of course."

"We can take care of it any time you say, honey. How about next week? No, we'll have double rehearsals next week."

"Joe, couldn't we go right away tomorrow?"

She felt panicky in the grayness of the room that was just wakening into light. Nothing seemed real, not the shadowy outlines of their bodies on the bed, or the hollows of grayness at the windows, or her mandarin coat lying across a chair and smoldering dully. The dream seemed more real than any of these things she knew to be real, and so she felt panicky and said again, "Joe, couldn't we get married tomorrow?"

He sneezed then, and shattered the shadowy unreality into life.

"You're catching cold!"

"Hell, no. I'm just clearing my throat."

But she jumped up and closed the window and drew the covers around him.

"Okay?"

"Fine, honey. Listen, you pick any day you like. Only check with Frank to be sure he hasn't got anything set. Do I have to get all dressed up?"

"I never thought about that," she said, snuggling up against him and feeling warm and secure and not gray and shadowy any more. "No, we won't get into those wedding clothes. To us, it would be like going to work. In those clothes. No, I don't want to marry you in any tux."

"I could wear slacks and a sweater."

"Look, Joe, don't carry this thing too far!"

"Okay, dopey. We can get Bill to get the license and stuff. He'll know about those things."

"And we'll just go down to City Hall and get to be Mr. and Mrs. Joe Geddes!"

"Hello, Mrs. Geddes," he said.

"Hello, Mr. Geddes. Joe, I'm awfully happy about it, aren't you? Joe, put your arms around me."

He did and they were very happy about it together.

But they didn't get married that next week. Joe got pneumonia that next week. He didn't get pneumonia on purpose. She knew that. He got it because he was worn out physically, and then he caught cold that rainy Sunday, and then he had to pose for color pictures on the roof on a windy day. He was over-tired, the doctor said, and it wasn't surprising that he came to work one night, his face the dull red color of paprika, and collapsed at the end of the fourth set.

The band played the hotel without him, while his radio sponsors hustled him off to Florida in a special plane so he could recuperate in time to start the air series. When he came back from Florida, he had a cab to bring him to work

and a cab to take him straight home afterwards. Irene didn't see him away from the job at all until the day before they were to go on the road for the summer.

She got up that morning and went down to the restaurant for breakfast. In her mail there was a card from Bo Lashky, from the Middle West some place. Omaha. "Hope you're still packing them in," he wrote on the back of the card. "Hope I can look you up when I get back in town in the fall and I'm out of this racket and going to school. Lots of luck. Your old friend, Bo."

That was fine. That was just dandy. She hated Bo Lashky and his easy, settled future. She hated herself and her summer that stretched away bleakly over miles of U. S. highways and blocks of American bandstands. She hated Joe Geddes, too. No, she couldn't quite make that hate stick. She felt uncertain, sitting quietly in the restaurant of her expensive apartment hotel. This was no place to feel uncertain—no place for a successful singer, with a hundred dollars worth of smart black suit on her back and twenty dollars worth of shoes on her feet, to feel uncertain. But Irene felt uncertain, with a memory of champagne and metal thread and the smell of gardenias and the colors of poinsettia and sooty black at the tip of her mind.

So she went to see him.

He was stretched out on the top of the bed in his hotel room, and Frank was trying to get him to finish with two arrangers and a song publisher so they could go over the details of the tour. She moved the breakfast tray from a chair and sat down and waited. When all of them had gone, he said, "Jesus! It's good to see you, baby. It's been a long time."

"I tried to see you, Joe. But there were always so many people and doctors and things around."

"I know, baby. I'm sorry."

She sat down on the side of the bed and he moved over to make room for her.



"I want to quit the band, Joe," she said. "I can't go on the road with you."

"You what!" He sat straight up and looked at her. "Honey, you can't!" He took her hands in his. "Listen, honey, I wasn't acting like a louse. I couldn't help it about getting sick—and being all tied up."

"I know, Joe. I didn't say you could."

"You know I would have done something if I could. If ever we get out of all this mess, honey, we'll get married right away. You know I've got it down among the things I've got to do. You know that, don't you?"

"I suppose so, Joe."

"Irene, baby, you know so. I want to do whatever you want to do—only, Jesus, I go nutty with all this stuff."

He dropped her hands and rubbed his hair all over his head in a way she remembered with a small thud of pain inside her.

"Listen, Irene, it didn't used to be so important, did it, this marrying thing. What makes it like this now?"

"I don't know, Joe. I don't even know that it's that important. But then, there are so many things I don't seem to know about any more that I—well, I just have to stop and figure them out, I guess. I have to have some time to myself, I guess. And I don't want to go on the road with you again. I want to quit the band."

"Please don't, honey. I'm asking you please not to. I'm asking you not to run away from me, not to let me down. I need you!"

"That's not true," she said sharply. "You don't need me at all. You haven't needed me for more than a month."

"I do need you. Even if they wouldn't let you see me, I knew you were there. I knew I'd see you at night, on the job. I look over to see if you're there, and when you're there, I feel better. I wouldn't want to have anything to do with the whole damned business if you weren't there."

"Honest, Joe?"

"Honest. You know I'm no good making up stuff like that. Sure, I know I'm not any good at making ways to see you the way other guys do. I—well, it never seemed necessary with you and me."

"No, that's true."

He put his arms around her then and held her close.

"Jesus!" he said. "I thought I remembered it was like this. I wasn't sure."

She kissed him back.

"Yes, it's like this, Joe. If you really need me . . ."

He held her from him, arm's length, and looked in her eyes.

"I really need you," he said, "and I don't know what I'd do if you went away."

They were on the road all summer, and came back into New York that fall to play at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

## Chapter XVIII

NONE OF THEM LOOKED INCONGRUOUS IN the Waldorf Astoria. They wore beautifully cut maroon tuxes, with deep blue carnations in their buttonholes. Except Joe. Joe wore tails. A blue carnation in his buttonhole, too, but tails. White tie and tails. And none of them looked incongruous. Confident, yes. The boys all had that look of impersonal confidence now. You could see it in their faces that they were men who did something well and who knew that they did it well, men who liked doing it well and being well-paid to do it.

Watching them play, from the little table reserved for her and for Joe, off to one side of the stand, Irene thought: Maybe I'd be impressed with this place if I hadn't known Eddie Novik when he used to lend his tux to Joe so Joe could get a job. And if I didn't remember that the famous hot drummer Danny Acosta is a guy used to play for my Dad in a cheap nickelodeon in Chicago. And if I didn't have it in my mind that little Robbie Freeman was born in some comfort for his mother because I made Joe let Bobby take a stinking rehearsal piano job. Maybe I'd be impressed with this place if I didn't know so damned much about how we came to be here. Without wanting to change any of it for this place. . . .

She didn't like the job at the Waldorf Astoria, but there were so many things about her life she didn't like that this job wasn't breaking any camel's back. She was here. He said he wanted her here, had to have her here. But where was he? He was always off somewhere having a ginger ale—he never drank on the job—with one of the customers. Excuse me. At the Waldorf Astoria they're guests.

There was a watching and waiting now between her and Joe. As soon as the band got its long-promised vacation, he said, they would certainly get married. But Irene wasn't buying any trousseau. She was saying to herself, "Of course, we are. I'm perfectly sure we are"—and knowing again a far-off taste of champagne, a gardenia fragrance, a momentary vision of metal thread and poinsettia and soot, knowing them in the vagrant way you know that Spring is near because one day, for a fraction of a second, your nostrils catch a whiff of something that says Spring to them.

The fragrance of gardenias was real. Bo Lashky brought real gardenias to her lonely table most Saturday nights. Saturday was the only night he could come because he had classes or tutors the rest of the week. He and Irene sat and talked and enjoyed themselves. "Like Mulrooney's," he said. "A very high-class Mulrooney's."

One Saturday night, Bob Elwood, Joe's press agent, brought Joe over for pictures with Bo. The story about Bo's quitting the fight game had been in all the papers, with pictures of him on his college campus. Bo, in his line, was a celebrity, and Bob Elwood, in his line, was always interested in celebrities to tie in with his client, Joe Geddes. Bob Elwood wanted to take a picture of Bo Lashky with Joe Geddes' saxophone in his mouth.

"King of Swing teaches Duke of Dukes a Little Jive on the Grunt Horn," Bob Elwood said, speaking softly and very fast, the way he always spoke. "Like it, Joe?"

"Okay," Joe said.

But Bo said, thanks, he was through with that stuff now. Bo said what kind of malarky was this anyhow. He couldn't play the saxophone.

"You're learning, see," Bob Elwood explained patiently, persuasively, as if he were talking to a small child. "You've quit the fight game and you're trying something new, see. Photo editors will eat it up!"

Bo laughed his low growl.

"I'm trying something new, all right, but it isn't playing the saxophone."

"He's going to college, remember, Joe?" Irene said.

Joe remembered, but it took him a long time these days to keep a thing straight in his mind. It wasn't that his mind didn't grasp things. There were too many things clinging to the surface of his mind these days, and it took a while for a new one to get a foothold on that crowded surface.

"Oh, yeah," Joe said, absently. "Bo College."

"That's good, Joe! That's great! Can I use that? You mind if I plant that in some column, Bo?"

"No, I don't mind. You mind, Joe?"

"Hell, no," said Joe. "As if it would make any difference. . . ."

Bob Elwood dragged him off then to have his picture taken playing a glass clarinet somebody was promoting. You couldn't play a glass clarinet, but it was a novel idea and the pictures would certainly get printed. Joe called over his shoulder as he was being led away, "So long, Bo College. 'Night, Irene."

It wasn't time for him to say goodnight yet, even an off-handed goodnight like that. But it didn't hurt her so much any more when he did. It didn't hurt her so much because she protected herself now by not feeling anything more about him than she could help.

She looked at Bo Lashky, sitting there, relaxed and contented and solid. Yes, that was the way he looked—solid. Solid and dependable and one to dispose of uncertainty.

"You look as if you enjoy what you're doing, Bo," she said.

"Not doing anything at all. Just enjoy being here with you."

"But you do something all week that you like. Going to school. Studying."

"Isn't that I like it so much exactly. It's necessary and I

know why I'm doing it. Maybe that's part of liking something."

"And I never even ask you about what you're doing, about your school and everything! Musicians are a narrow bunch, Bo. Now you take Joe. Honestly, he doesn't even know there's anything else but the music. You talk to him about anything else and he listens to you, but with some part of his mind where it doesn't really register. Then you say something about the music and even his face changes. It comes alive. I mean, it looks as if he was awake again."

"Wouldn't want to be that much of a specialist, I don't think. What about this world you have to live in? And the people in it you have to live with? You're part of it. Can't change that. Can't just do one thing and shut out everything else."

"You've got to if you want to make a big success of anything in this world we live in!"

"That doesn't necessarily make it good, though, does it?"

"No, it doesn't make it good at all. Oh, Bo, I don't like it at all. It seems like something that happened to us, that we didn't have anything to do with at all. It just happened and now we can't stop it. Joe only wanted to make them listen to the music. In the beginning. And now they've taken him over. All of them."

"Hardly Joe's fault. People will take you over long as they make money out of you. Sure. Take Mike Provo. Did he want me to quit the fight game? Not much. Tried to attach my bank account. Said it was breach of contract."

"So that's why you study law! To get yourself out of breach of contract suits!"

"No, not that. Knew enough not to get stuck with that. That's not the important thing. What's the percentage, making a lot of money for somebody else, doing something you don't even like doing? You can do something about it. You can quit this racket, Irene."

"Well, I don't do so bad for myself either, you know."

"Except you don't care about that much money. The ones getting the percentage do. You do the work—and you don't even like it any more, doing it the way they want it!"

"See here, what kind of talk is this! Don't you get enough lectures at school?"

He smiled and patted her hand. He had let his hair grow longer now and his face had filled out a little. In his neat dinner jacket, he was a handsome man. No, not handsome exactly. A man you'd turn around to look at, though.

"Mind if I make my point?" he said. "Since I been to college, I get restless, if I'm left with my conversation hanging in mid-air."

Irene leaned across the table and patted his hand, too.

"I was only teasing Bo. I like hearing you talk the way you do. I get pretty tired of all this razzle dazzle, if you really want to know."

"You get tired and pretty soon it shows in the music. That's my point. Listen to Joe now. . . ."

She was instantly on guard.

"What's wrong with Joe?"

"Shadow boxing. Making passes at the music. Punching, but not knocking anything down."

Joe was taking a solo on a Gershwin tune, *Lady Be Good*. He was playing it rounded and even and his tone was very clear and smooth. But there were no sparks. There was only the steady, dependable heat of an electric light bulb.

Irene listened. It was true. She heard it, too.

"You don't have to listen to him. That's what it is, Bo. He doesn't compel you to listen to him any more. He repeats himself. That's what he's doing. Repeating himself."

She felt a small, nagging pull of shame. Well, this was loyalty, this was. Talking like this to Bo Lashky about Joe. She was a little angry, and she said, a little angrily, "How come you know so much?"

"Say, Irene, I'm not trying to butt in or anything. I like music. You know that. Like jazz, but don't go out of my

head about it. It's a hard kind of music to cheat on, and Joe is cheating on it. Don't know why. None of my business anyhow."

"What are you trying to say, Bo?"

"Not sure I know yet. But something like this. Here's this world we live in. And the people we got to live with in it, like I said. Some of them make money off what other people do. The ones that make the money keep driving the other ones to make them more money. It's easy to see with people like you. And Joe, too. You made the music and you made it good. And then too many people start making money off it. And pretty soon, you're making more money than music. Too many things happen to you, like you said. They take over, like you said. Too many things get between you and the music."

"What do you do, then, Bo?"

"You make a break. You fight for your way of doing it and the hell with them!"

Irene was silent because she thought he was right. He had made the break himself and he was convincing when he talked about it.

"Let's get out of here, Bo."

"Can you leave now?"

"Oh, sure. Joe won't care."

She sent up word with a waiter and Joe looked over and nodded and Irene and Bo left.

"I have a hell of a headache," she said when they got in the cab.

He told the driver to open the top a little and ride around. It was warm for January, and the fresh air felt fine. Irene leaned back and began to relax. Most guys would have told the driver to drive around the Park. And the Park would have made her restless. Too quiet. But Bo told the driver to go down Broadway—all the way to the Battery.

It was the first time he had ever put his arm around her and he asked her first if she would mind. She didn't mind



at all. She sat close to him, with her head on his big soft camel's hair shoulder and his arm around her. They hardly talked at all. It would have been difficult for her to express the feeling of solid strength she got from the big circle of his arm around her, so it was just as well they didn't talk. Her headache actually began to go away a little and she dozed off. She felt cradled and protected and unafraid, so she dozed off until they got to the Battery.

A heavy fog lay like a shroud over the harbor and the night was alive with the sound of foghorns—different pitches, different lengths, different tone qualities. It was music orchestrated by a madman—a madman who has not yet been born, but who will always wonder why the men before him did not write such music. Bo stopped the cab so she could listen to the foghorns.

The most wonderful horn seemed to come from over by the Staten Island Ferry. It played three slow, sad, trombone notes. They were regularly spaced and monotonous, but every time they made their entrance into this fog of sound, you noticed them. A long time ago, she and Joe had stood over there, by the railing, and she had shaken with relief when his anger was spent. She looked at the place where the railing must be and she listened to the three, slow, sad trombone notes of that most wonderful horn.

"Do you like listening to the river on a night like this, Bo?"

He had drawn away from her and she had let him go, wondering if it was possible that he understood she wanted to be alone, but thinking it more likely that he was hurt at her silence and at her withdrawal. He moved back, when she spoke, quite casually, and put his strong, warm arm around her again. He held her closely for a minute, then relaxed his hold, like a greeting to one who has been away and is returned.

"Not much," he said. "Too sad."

"Yes, it's sad. Let's go."

When he left her, at her hotel, he put a small package in her hand and would have gone. But she insisted on opening it immediately. It was a small gold heart, with her name engraved on one side and a tiny diamond set in the other. It hung from a slender gold chain. It was exquisite and dainty and looked like something you give to a little girl for her birthday. Nobody had ever given Irene anything like it in her life.

"It looks like something for a little girl to wear," she said.

"It is. I'd be a fool, Irene, not to know you must have some idea how I feel about you. To me, you're a little girl I'd like to protect and take care of. That's what the locket means, I guess."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Go on to bed now. I'll call you. Talk about it some other time."

He was holding the cab door open with one hand and he gave her a little shake to send her on her way.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Thank you very much for my locket."

She held up her face, smiling, and he bent and kissed her on the mouth.

As she went up in the elevator, she found herself humming a little tune. Nothing in the band's books. Just a tune. She felt better than she had felt for months. She felt light-hearted and young and loved.

When she was lying in bed, thinking the thing over, she did not trust her thoughts. They might well be night thoughts, wonderful in the dark, but ordinary, even stupid, when you woke up in the morning. She thought that she *wanted* somebody to treat her like a little girl. She wanted somebody who would let her live her own way, and cherish her while she lived that way. She wanted somebody she could depend on, too. Somebody who, when he said that he would do a thing, would do it. A whole man, not one driven by everything and everybody around him. A man who existed

as a person, a man who existed aside from his job and was not possessed by it.

All right. So she was painting a picture of everything that Joe was not. It was not a picture she had made up out of her head. It was not a picture she had dreamed in this room in an uncertain grayness where nothing seemed real but a dream. It was a picture she knew existed and, if she wanted it, she could have it. She got up and walked, barefoot, over to the dressing table. The locket Bo had given her lay beside the powder box that played *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Its small diamond eye winked up at her in the pencil of light that came through the Venetian blind from the street. She picked up the chain gently, slipped it around her throat and fastened the clasp. The small gold heart felt cool and delicate there, just between her breasts, like a feather of glass. She turned the diamond side over and ran her fingers along the engraving of the letters that spelled "Irene."

Then she went back to bed and slept the way little girls are supposed to sleep . . . the innocent, dreamless sleep of the untroubled.

## Chapter XIX

WHEN THE PHONE RANG THE FIRST TIME, the blue taffeta comforter on the bed heaved and squirmed and then subsided. When the phone rang again, insistently, several times, a long, bare, delicately hairy arm emerged from beneath the blue taffeta comforter and picked up the receiver.

"Good morning, Mr. Geddes," the operator said. "It's nine o'clock."

The arm put down the receiver and withdrew beneath the comforter once more.

The large bed on which lay the comforter that sheltered the arm, stood by a window whose loose shade snapped in the brisk March wind. Across from the bed, stood a bureau, the glass top of which was cluttered with assorted studs, cuff links, combs and brushes, an electric razor, and a wilted blue carnation. Folded neatly across a chair by the bureau lay a pair of black pants; the tails were on a hanger on the closet door. There was a rowing machine where the chaise longue would have been for a woman tenant and a sun lamp stood in the corner behind the bathroom door.

Looking through the bedroom door, you could see the sitting room. The sitting room had the impersonal elegance of a man's expensive hotel suite. Nobody had put flowers or books or photographs around, the way a woman will do to take away that casual, dead look. The divan and the big chairs, upholstered in white leather, were set precisely in their places on the deep maroon rug each morning. The matching white leather occasional chairs were set precisely in *their* places, along with the tables and the big white lamps, after the daily dusting. In the corner between the two south

windows, stood a big radio-phonograph. There were many records stacked in the record cabinet beside it; the records were the only clue in the sitting room that anybody at all lived there. Eastern light poured in, mornings, and southern light, afternoons, as was proper for an expensive suite on the twentieth floor of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

His discreet knock on the bedroom door was not answered, so Sam opened the door and pushed the breakfast tray in on its little cart. Sam's face was a rounded triangle of patent leather with the narrow part near his shoulders. He wore a white coat, the kind that barbers wear, over his blue turtle-neck sweater. Sam went over and shook the blue taffeta comforter where it was humpiest.

"Come on now, boss," Sam said. "Get up and have your breakfast. You gotta record date at ten, remember. Ain't no human time to make no records, but you got this date just the same. Come on now, boss."

Joe pushed back the comforter till his eyes showed, and looked at Sam. Sam was a grumbler. Sam complained and disapproved of everything, with an irritation the more bitter because he could do nothing about any of the things he complained about. Sam was a young cousin of Pug Johnson's who had hung around the band for a year, worshipfully doing things for Joe, till he ended up as Joe's valet. He refused to acclimate himself to what he called this "hotty totty way of living," but he enjoyed, just the same, telling his Harlem buddies how many suits and ties and pairs of shoes Joe Geddes had, how many shirts and pajamas "with a little J and a little G worked right spang in the fronts." Sam, grumbling, was an outlet for Joe, an expression of all the irritation and complaining Joe almost but not quite felt himself. He seldom had time to feel it and he did not need to express it because Sam expressed it for him.

His irritation at another early record date slid away this morning, too, in the current of Sam's grumbling, and he pulled himself up in bed and took the navy silk robe Sam

handed him. Ten o'clock was too early to play. Your lip felt stiff and your head was full of sleep and there was no excitement in your veins. But ten o'clock in the morning seemed to be the only time they had to make records any more. And the record contract called for the same number of records every month, no matter how you felt at what time of any day. Joe's vicarious bad temper spent itself in Sam's grumbling while he ate his breakfast. No time this morning to row or sit under the sun lamp. He could not remember what it was he had to do today, but somebody would tell him sooner or later and it would be a lot.

The phone rang steadily while Joe was dressing and he could hear fragments of Sam's conversations.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Linder. I sure will do that. . . . One o'clock sharp. Only it might be a little later than that. They records till one."

"No, sir, ma'am. Mr. Geddes positively can not be interviewed this week. . . . I can't help it what Mr. Elwood said. I'm telling you what Mr. Geddes said."

"You calling for who? . . . Mr. Clyde? . . . Oh, yeah. To which? . . . Oh, sure. Why'n't you say so in the first place? That's right. Rehearsal's at three o'clock. Playhouse Number Two. . . . No, can't nobody talk to him. I got trouble enough trying to get him to the recording studio on time. It's going on ten now. . . . Okay, you do that, ma'am."

"Now, Miss Irene, you don't want to go making me no more trouble. He didn't even see his mail yet."

Joe walked out of the bathroom.

"I'll talk to Miss Irene, Sam," he said.

"Now there you go, boss, and you only got twenty minutes. You don't show much good sense this morning. Not that you do any morning."

Joe picked up the phone.

"Joe! I want to see you—right away!"

"Now, honey? For hell's sake, I'm on my way to that damned record date. Sam's on my tail this minute."

"Couldn't you be late? I've *got* to see you!" Her voice sounded harsh and thick and urgent, as if she had smoked all night.

"For God's sake, Irene, what can be so damned important at ten o'clock in the morning?"

"Joe, it's just that . . ." The urgency went out of her voice like a snuffed candle. "Never mind, Joe. I guess you're right. It isn't that important. Nothing is that important between us any more."

"Well, that's a hell of a way to talk. Listen, can't it wait till lunch? How about lunch?"

"You got a lunch date with Mr. Linder, boss."

"Oh, damn it. Sam says I've got a lunch date with Frank. Well, why not at rehearsal?"

"No," she said. "Rehearsal will be too late."

"Too late for what? What's the big mystery? Listen, honey, there's the two hours I always have between rehearsal and the broadcast. Want to come up then? Come back with me after rehearsal?"

"Well . . . okay, Joe. Yes, I'll want to see you anyhow."

Sam said, "You want the whole place full of people, boss? You told that arranger to come after the rehearsal. Person can't have a minute's peace around here!"

"Hey, Irene, wait! Sam says I told Barney to come after rehearsal."

"Never mind, Joe. It doesn't matter now, Joe."

Something small and uncanny, like a pale wraith bleeding, was in her voice. He heard it finally and he said quickly, "Never mind Barney. I'll do something else about him. Come over after rehearsal, will you?"

"Okay, Joe. Yes, I'll come."

"Boss! It's a quarter to ten!"

Joe hung up.

"Okay, Sam. I'm ready. Bring the mail. I'll read it in the cab on the way up."

Grumbling under his breath, Sam collected the mail and

Joe's instruments. He took off the white coat and put on a yellow one and a flat brown felt hat. He went down in the service elevator and met Joe at the cab stand.

When they got to the recording studio, the band was already set up. Johnny and Eddie and that new kid trumpet player from the Coast, Harrison, were playing something together. Harrison let go of a break that slithered down in repeated notes and ended with a terrific gliss. Joe lifted his head from his mail to listen, but just then Morty, the record company production man, came over.

"Do that new pop tune first," Morty said. "Then *Sugarfoot*, Barney's original, and the trio. Okay?"

Joe said okay and went over and got his horns from Sam who had them all assembled by now. Looking up from the clarinet in which Sam had just put a new reed, Joe saw Irene, sitting on a chair to the right of the sax section. She had on a red hat, pushed back off her forehead, small and pert. Her hair was very black against the vivid red of the hat. She was wearing flowers—a corsage that seemed almost too big for her to carry. Gardenias. The man beside her was Bo Lashky. What the hell was he doing here and why wasn't he at that college whatever it was? He looked very much at home, with his arm resting lightly on the back of Irene's chair. Joe resented him sitting there beside Irene so early in the morning. Nobody had a date at ten in the morning. Had she spent the night with him? Was he there when she made that crazy phone call? Was there something between those two? What in hell was he doing, standing here asking himself questions, with the reed still untightened in the mouthpiece? What the hell was it to him anyway?

Morty called "Stand by" from the control room. And all the questions faded off into that infinity of Joe's mind, that infinity of unanswered questions that were cut off as soon as they swam to the surface of his consciousness.

He looked down at the arrangement of the pop tune they were to start with. It had sounded pretty inane when they



rehearsed it, but he was obligated to do it. The record company gave it to him first. That's what you got for being their biggest name band. The tune was sure to be Number One on Your Hit Parade and sure to pick up his record sales.

He began to play. This is what went on in his mind while he played: . . . He ought to give Danny his notice. No matter how often Frank sent Danny to the barber, the tailor, the cleaner, he always had that beat-up speakeasy look. He drank too much, too, and he chewed what looked like a whole pack of gum at a time. It would mean looking up two new men, because Joe knew that Dorsey had made Johnny an offer. The hell with it. Let Johnny take it. Johnny was getting to think he ran the whole brass section anyhow. He'd have to speak to Irene again about those pop vocals. She was singing the lyrics now so that anybody could hear what a hunk of tripe it was. No use lousing up a tune that was sure to sell. . . .

The pop tune was over then, and they listened to the playback. The brass section was the only lift on the record.

"Okay for *Sugarfoot*," Joe told the boys.

"Ten seconds," Morty called from the control room.

*Sugarfoot* was swell. There was something about the old tunes. This one, for instance, that still made him think of the first night he hit Chicago, in that vague, far-off time when the jigs were calling this tune *Dipper Mouth Blues*. When the trumpet solo came up, Joe was surprised to hear the new kid take it. He gave it that same hard, quivering, insinuating brilliance he'd been giving it when Joe came in, squeezing out the same kind of gliss at the end. The kid was very good. Johnny had told him to take the solo, without consulting Joe. Johnny had a lot of nerve. Johnny could go to Dorsey. Joe played his own solo then, and the boys waited for him to finish so the brass and drums could take it away from him on the refrain. They made it rock like a hammer.

Then Danny spit out his gum, stood up and, in the tradi-

tional place, shouted "Oh, play that thing!"

Joe yelled, "Cut!"

The music stopped.

"What goes on?" Morty said on the talkback from the control room.

"Listen, you guys," Joe said and he was sore. "You know damned well we don't do that damned hollering on *Sugarfoot*."

Danny stood up and he was sore, too. He looked sleepy and his shirt was open at the throat.

"It was good enough for Papa Joe and Louis," Danny said, "and it's good enough for you!"

"We're not making any hallelujah, shouting records," Joe said, tense. "You take the lick on the bass drum like I told you. Who's making this record—you or me?"

"I can tell you who's making it stink, should you care to know!"

"I don't care to know. You take the lick on the drum or else . . ."

Danny started to move forward, but Bobby leaned over to him and so did Johnny, one on each side. Bobby said something and laughed.

"Okay, Mussolini," Danny said, and sat down and made the bass drum say, "Oh, play that thing." Then he turned to one side and spat.

They did *Sugarfoot* again. Joe's anger, subsiding, left a bitter taste like brass against his tongue.

Barney's original went okay, and playing with the trio helped take away the bitterness. There was a restfulness for Joe in playing with Pug and Cozy. They never seemed to be harassed and full of noisy temper like the rest of them. Joe envied them the casual absorption with which they worked. Pug's drums made a solid floor on which the music walked. Cozy's guitar was so hot and joyful that Joe wanted to listen. Just sit there and play and listen to what they were playing and be rested. . . .

But just then he saw Frank coming in the door and he remembered that he had to spend lunch insisting on that vacation. He'd blow up if he didn't get that vacation. So would everybody else. It would make a mess of their dates, but it would have to be worked out somehow.

The trio finished up and he went over to where Frank waited. Bo and Irene were leaving.

"Hiya, Joe," Bo called to him as they passed.

"Okay, guy," Joe said. "How's Bo College?"

"Great! Ought to try it one of these days!"

"Yeah," Joe said. "A nice, quiet college would suit me just fine."

He looked down at Irene. She didn't laugh or move or say anything. Just looked steadily at him till Bo took her arm and led her out the door.

Joe and Frank went to lunch. It was a clear, cold, windy day—a day with a sharp blue crystal personality of its own.

"Let's walk," said Joe when they got down to the street.

"Sure," said Frank. "Get all that fog out of your brain. Day like this blows everything foggy out of your brain. And boy! do I feel foggy. Every time I get back from Chicago I get this foggy feeling."

"So you're foggy," Joe said. "Well, so am I. How about that vacation?"

"About that vacation, Joe. I don't think you ought to take a chance laying off just now when everything's going so good."

"Listen, Frank, I'm punchy. I can't even stand hearing music any more. I'm getting so I hate music. I'm getting so I hate everything!"

"We'll fight about it over a herring. . . . Wait for the light!"

In Lindy's, Bob Elwood was waiting for him.

"What do *you* want?"

"The pictures for that *Collier's* piece. The photographer's waiting."

"No pictures," said Joe.

"He's only got today to get them, Joe. You said it was okay when I checked it with you yesterday."

"Oh, hell. I suppose I'll have to do it then."

It was a quarter to three before they got through with the pictures. By the time Joe got to the radio theater, Frank was sitting there with these two guys—one from the advertising agency and one from the sponsor. The agency man, Burroughs, was hearty and red-cheeked. He had a sudden smile that burst, full of white teeth, from his lips at periodic intervals, not necessarily amusing ones. The other one, the sponsor's Mr. Clyde, was tall and thin with straw-colored hair and a low, husky voice. Mr. Clyde wore a wing collar that left considerable Adam's apple exposed and gave him a naked look.

Barney was going over a new number with the boys, so Joe and Frank went to the back of the darkened theater with Burroughs and Clyde and sat down. Those two kept looking at each other in a guarded way and, since it was time for contract renewal—or not—Joe wondered what they were going to spring.

Then they sprang it.

"Geddes," Burroughs began.

"Yeah?"

"Geddes . . ."

"You can call me Joe, after all this time, Burroughs."

They both laughed a little and Burroughs showed his teeth.

"Sure, Joe! Well, Joe, here's the idea . . ."

Clyde's husky voice interrupted quickly.

"The whole show's got to be revamped," he said. "We want to add a comedian."

"A what?"

"Comedian," said Burroughs, laughing heartily and showing his teeth and rubbing his hands together to give the idea of a comedian. "And a different guest star each week. Like

Kate Smith. Ted Lewis. Movie stars. You know. . . . This comedian will be the announcer."

"And the guests will do their own specialty, of course. Like Smith. She'll do the Moon song. And Lewis his Everybody Happy routine."

"I have anything to say about all this?" Joe asked. He was beginning to get it and he was beginning not to like it.

"Of course, Joe. You'll approve all selections, of course."

"In other words, you don't like our music any more."

"Not it at all, Joe," Burroughs said heartily. "The thing is this, in a nutshell. This swing stuff is beginning to go out. You know that as well as I do. And we got a product to sell, remember. We just want to tone down the band and dress up the show a little. Add some attractions—stuff that will really get us a good rating."

"We buy the show only with those specifications," Clyde said.

"Anything else?" Joe's voice was very quiet now. He didn't feel like fighting any more. He wasn't even sure what it was he should feel like fighting.

Clyde cleared his throat and said, "Well, yes. Two other things."

"Yeah—what?"

"As you know, our product sells extensively in the South. We have never objected to your trio playing on the program. But last week, unfortunately, by mistake, some pictures of them were released nationally. It isn't that we have anything against Negroes, you understand, but you know how some Southerners are. . . ."

"You want the trio out. What's the other thing?"

"About your vocalist," Burroughs said, taking over.

"What about her?"

"We feel the need for a slight change in that department."

"How slight?"

"Well, the truth of the matter is we want somebody more glamorous. A stunning blonde, say. Or even a cute blonde."

"We also want a different kind of voice," Clyde came back in. "A prettier voice. I have one in mind, as a matter of fact."

Slumped down in his seat, Joe looked over at Frank, but Frank wasn't looking his way. Frank was pretending not to listen. Frank had heard it all before.

"So that's the setup," Joe said. "How many broadcasts we got to run, Frank?"

"Four more after this."

Joe looked up towards the stage. Irene had just come in with Howie, the announcer. The boys were taking five, so there was a lull in the rehearsal. Irene went over and sat down beside Bobby at the piano and they talked together, with Howie leaning towards them on the closed piano top. They looked like people who were interested and relaxed and enjoying themselves and, in the middle of Bobby's noodling around, Irene began to sing. Howie had leaned down to ask her a question, probably asked her about some tune, and she began to sing.

"Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should," she sang. "Got the blues 'cause my man don't love me like he should. . . . He's a care-liss man and he ain't gonna do me no good. . . ."

In the quiet of the darkened theater, you could hear her very distinctly. Burroughs looked at Clyde and showed his teeth. His teeth shone in the dark. Joe was sore because he'd told the boys not to amuse themselves barrel-housing on the sponsor's time. He was sore, too, because he didn't know what to do about this new setup. He had to stay on the air. It was bad for a band to go off the air. Everybody said so. But he couldn't think what to do. He had to finish this rehearsal first. . . .

"Money don't make no man worth his weight in gold. . . . Money don't make no man worth his weight in gold. . . . Money only makes his heart and his love grow awful cold. . . ."

Danny came out on the stage now and sneaked in behind

her with a shuffling beat on the whisks, slow and easy. Danny looked just as sloppy as he always looked. Danny would rather play this old beat-up jive than make a good recording like *Sugarfoot*. "Old beat-up jive." Joe was amused at himself using those words. He used to say that was the way the guys talked about the music who couldn't play it. Johnny was on stage now, too, filling in the breaks in the blues with impudent growls and slides.

"Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot. . . . Got a care-liss man and I got him good and hot. . . . And I wouldn't take gold money for what that man has got. . . ."

Clyde fingered his wing collar. His Adam's apple moved up and down.

"Sounds like some Harlem nigger," he said to Burroughs' teeth.

Joe got to his feet.

"Kill it, you guys," he yelled up to the stage. "We got a broadcast to put together!"

"We have to have the contracts signed by tomorrow, Joe," Burroughs said, "if the new format is agreeable."

"Listen," Joe said, "I got a lot of work to do. Tell you what. Either me or Frank here will call you tomorrow and we'll get everything signed on the dotted line. Okay?"

"Okay, Joe. It's a deal."

When the broadcast rehearsal was finally over, Barney reminded Joe that what he had to see him about was an arrangement for tomorrow's theater opening. It couldn't wait, so Joe told Irene to go on over to the hotel and he'd meet her there later. He'd be along as soon as he could get there.

When he got there, she was just stepping into the elevator.

"What took you so long?" he said.

"I walked over."

"Walked?"

"Yes, you know, that stuff you do with your own two legs. It was invented before taxicabs."

"God, I live my whole life in taxicabs."

"Trouble with taxicabs is, you never see anything. All you see is yourself in a mirror."

He looked at her curiously.

"What do you see when you walk?"

"Oh, I don't know. Those big green and white busses, looping along like wounded Pullman cars . . . people coming home from work, right in the middle of the day, too! Kids on bicycles . . . a lot of stuff. . . ."

"You're crazy! You're starting to talk like that Bo College!"

"Am I?"

They got off the elevator and went into his suite. She sat down on the white leather divan while he went into the bedroom. She looked at the two occasional chairs, so precisely set in their right places.

"This room gives me the creeps," she said.

She got up and unpinned the gardenias Bo had sent that morning. When she had laid them on top of the phonograph, they gleamed whitely in the polished wood. They made the whole room look different, she thought, and she sat down again, satisfied, on the white leather divan.

He came in from the bedroom, wearing a navy blue dressing gown, and sat down beside her.

"Well, honey," he said, "it's been a long time!"

"What's been a long time?"

"Since we've been able to grab a few minutes like this for ourselves. Want a drink?"

"No, thanks."

"I do. Jesus, I need one. Sam! Fix me a drink, will you?"

He had already forgotten that today she had come to see him *about* something. She had not just come to see him.

"I'm afraid I'm not very good company today, honey," he said, when Sam brought his drink.

She did not say that he was not good company at all any more. She did not say that a person who was never there could not be any kind of company. She reminded herself



that it was all over for her now and it didn't make any difference to her what kind of company he was.

"You don't have to be good company, Joe," she said. "You don't have to do anything."

"That's all you know," he said. "I just have to revamp the whole damned radio show, that's all. They want to add a comedian—a comedian, mind you. We play *Sugarfoot* and then this comedian comes on. 'That's no lady, that's my wife,' this comedian says, or something. After our *Sugarfoot*!"

"Joe! You're not—"

"They say I have to get rid of the trio, too. They haven't anything against Negroes, you understand, but—"

"Why, the dirty, low-down so-and-so's. They can't do that to Cozy and Pug. Joe, you're not going to let them do that. Are you, Joe?"

"Let them? A lot I have to say about it. They won't take the show any other way, that Clyde guy says."

"Let them take some other show then. It doesn't have to be you."

"Listen, Irene. I can't afford to go off the air right now."

"You can't afford to go off the air!" Her voice was getting high and shrill. Her voice had a way of doing that now, she noticed, any time she got excited. Maybe her voice was changing, the way boys' voices changed when they were maturing. No, it wasn't her voice that was changing. "Don't tell me you can't afford to go off the air, Joe Geddes! You could afford to go off the air for the rest of your life . . . if you wanted to!"

"Listen," he said, "you don't need to be so almighty independent. They don't want you either. They think you sing like some Harlem nigger. They want a blonde who sings pretty."

She heard the words and she understood them, of course. It was only that she could not believe it was Joe Geddes who was saying them.

"Okay, Joe," she said, and her voice was back to normal

now. "You won't have to worry about me. I'm quitting anyhow."

"My God! Not again!"

". . . but if you let them do that to Cozy and Pug. . . ."

She did not know how to finish the sentence. There was nothing she could threaten now that would make the slightest difference. To him or to her. It was not like that time with Bobby and the rehearsal job. She was going to walk out the door again, but this time she wouldn't be waiting for him to come after her, nor for herself to come back and meet him halfway.

"Well, I'm waiting," he said. "If I let them do that to Cozy and Pug, you were saying. What kind of threat have you got for me this time?"

"I haven't got any threats for you, Joe," she said. "Threats aren't any good to us any more. I tried to talk to you this morning because it was terribly important. It was terribly important because Bo Lashky asked me to marry him and I didn't know what to do. I wanted you to help me decide what to do. You didn't. You wouldn't. You can't any more. I'm going to marry Bo Lashky, Joe. I'll sing tonight's broadcast and finish the week at the hotel. But that's all, Joe. I'm leaving then, Joe."

He walked up and down the room once. He thought that he should be able to say something, do something. But too many things were happening today about which he had nothing to say. Before, when she said she was going away, he knew she would come back. It was right that she should come back, that he should not be deprived of her. Now she was going away and she was making it sound so final. Too final. What the hell right had she to make anything sound so final?

"Well," he said, "some people can stand success and some can't."

"Stand it!" She stood up, too, and faced him. "Do you think *you're* standing it? Why, you big baby!"

"Never mind babying me! I don't need your babying. I'm doing all right!"

"So you're doing all right, are you? Look at you! You're shaking like a leaf! And all you're thinking about is how you can get that radio show. You don't even *care* about Cozy and Pug. You'll give in all right. You won't fight! There's no fight in you any more!"

He put his hands on her arms. "Don't let's fight, Irene," he said, helplessly. "Listen, can't we be like we used to be? I'll think of some way out of it. Listen, I'll make them take you back, too."

She pulled away from him. She was angry with a cold steel anger. She jerked her cold steel anger away from the quicksand of his helplessness. She laughed, not because she was amused, but because she was angry like cold steel and, like steel, contemptuous of helplessness.

"You don't need to try even. I wouldn't go back. Not for anything—and certainly not for anything you think you can do. Don't talk to me about standing success. Success is eating you away like a worm, Joe Geddes. Success and money. And all you're getting is more success and more money! All you're getting is so that you blow success and money out of your horn. Instead of music. And you *want* the success and the money!"

He started to raise his head to protest. He had lowered his head protectively, because her words were like blows, hitting at his unprotected head.

"Don't deny it, Joe! You do. You *like* living this way. It's a habit with you now and you can't stop it. You don't even want to stop it because that would mean you'd have to think and feel and fight—and you don't want to think and feel and fight any more. Or to play either! You used to play it the way you wanted, the way you knew was right and you fought for it and you made them like it. You made something new, Joe, and it was yours and you loved it. But you let them take it away from you and now it isn't yours any more. It's

just something you do for money! Little Gate! They used to call you Little Gate—remember?”

He remembered. At least, something flickered in his eyes as if he remembered. His eyes flickered and turned away from her as she stood there, shouting at him, her voice high and shrill again.

“Little Gate! Only now you’re a Big Stick . . . a Big Stick to beat yourself to death with! All right! Go beat yourself to death!”

She had grabbed him by the arms and she was shaking him. He let her shake him. When her arms ached from it, she dropped them and looked at her hands, surprised. She put one hand over her mouth because a horrible, tearing sob was coming out of her mouth. She caught the sob in her cupped hand and turned and walked quickly out of the door, not closing it. Joe heard the elevator stop, then start again. In the pit of his stomach he could feel it dropping to the lobby. The room now screamed with silence and he stood there, listening to it, until Sam came and got him.

“Pull yourself together, boss,” Sam said. “You gotta get over to the broadcast. Miss Irene’s got a right to quit she wants to.”

## Chapter XX

SAM LED JOE INTO THE BEDROOM BY THE arms that still throbbed from her strong fingers.

"Ten minutes after seven o'clock and you ain't even dressed yet, boss. How you gonna get to that broadcast by quarter to eight? Sit down. Eat your supper."

Joe sat down because Sam eased him into the chair. Joe looked at the table set by his bed, set with its silver-covered dishes. The salt and pepper shakers were tall and they were silver, too. The fruit cocktail in its glass bowl was slightly lopsided because the ice in which it sat in its silver container was melting away.

"Anybody ain't got the good sense to eat," Sam grumbled, "don't deserve no food."

Joe looked up at him from the table and Sam was frightened at the way Joe looked. His face was the mottled gray color of cigarette ash and his eyes were set and unseeing.

"You need a drink, boss," Sam said quickly. "You sure do need a drink."

He brought a bottle of Scotch and held the jigger for Joe. Joe drank it, and held out the jigger for another. He drank five, one right after the other. Then a warmth came back to his body and he finished eating. He dressed and went out the door with Sam. When the elevator came, Sam started down the hall as usual, toward the service car.

"Sam! Don't go!"

Sam came back and took Joe by the arm.

"He ain't feeling so good," Sam told the operator.

They went down in the service elevator together and out to the cab stand. When they saw Joe, the mob of kids began

to call him by his first name and hold out their papers for autographs. He pushed through them and got into the cab.

"He ain't feeling so good," Sam explained to the kids nearest him.

"He's a stuck-up old thing," called a girl who hadn't been able to get close enough to see her idol. She wore a flowered handkerchief over her head and had on a fleece-lined jacket. She owned every record Joe Geddes had made in the last year. "It wouldn't hurt him to sign his name," she said. Then all of them started to run in order to get to the radio theater before he did. In the cab, Sam looked at his boss and was scared again.

"Bad enough you won't talk," Sam grumbled, "you don't have to look like a zombie, sitting there."

They crossed Fifth Avenue, going west.

"You want another drink, boss?"

Sam pulled the bottle out of his pocket and Joe tipped it up and drank. Then he started to put it in his own pocket, but without the cork. Sam grabbed for it.

"What kind of way is that to do?" Sam scolded. He corked the bottle and put it in his own pocket.

At the theater, Johnny and Danny were fighting their way through the kids to get into the alley that led backstage. A couple of kids on the outside of the crowd recognized them and yelled for autographs. Johnny and Danny laughed and signed and went on in. Sam opened the door of the cab. He stood there, waiting for Joe, and telling the clamoring kids not to get in the way, now. Mr. Geddes was late this minute and it was nearly broadcast time.

"Come on, give us some extra tickets, mister," the girl with the flowered handkerchief over her head said.

It was too much to face. Joe got out of the other side of the cab and walked toward Eighth Avenue between the rows of cars that were waiting for the light to change. Just as the light did change, he heard a voice yell, surprised, "He's not there! He's gone!" He ducked into a cab that was just shift-

ing to cross the street. It kept on going, but the driver heard him shut the door and turned his head half way.

"Where to, mister?" the driver said without surprise.

"Oh, anywhere . . . Harlem," Joe said, and the way he said it made the driver turn around again. He looked at this man in tails slumped in the corner of his cab with his head hanging between his shoulders.

"You all right, buddy?" the driver asked.

"I'm okay," came from the slumped figure in the corner, and the driver shrugged and turned north on Ninth Avenue.

Joe Geddes was beginning to feel again. He wished that this were not so, but there it was. He felt the leather of the seat cold under his hand and the sharp prodding of the stiff collar in his neck. He moved his head and felt the ball of pain that was there shifting a little. He looked out the window and saw that they were at 59th Street.

"I'll get out here," he said.

"This ain't Harlem, buddy."

"I'll get out here."

He wanted to see if he could still move by himself and he wanted air. He could move, and he walked back to the hotel. The air felt fine in his face. He wanted to get to the hotel while the broadcast was still on the air. The broadcast was a little island of time on which sat all the people who would be after him when the program was over and the sign-off connected them with the mainland of living again. He'd think then what he'd do. He wasn't due on the stand up on the Roof till nine. By then he'd think of something. He went up in the service elevator. The phone was ringing when he went inside his own suite, but he let it ring.

Irene's gardenias were lying on top of the phonograph in the sitting room. They were smudged with brown around the edges and their heavy fragrance was thin and sour. They were dying and they were lonely in their dying because she had gone away and left them. She had gone away and left them with him because she did not like the place he lived in.

She should have kept them and taken care of them and then they would not have died. He should have kept her and taken care of her and then she would not have left him another man's flowers to die on top of his phonograph.

He opened the phonograph and the gardenias slid off to the floor. He took a recording of one of his broadcasts from the cabinet where they were kept, put it on the phonograph, and set the needle going. Then he knelt to the floor and picked up the flowers. The pin was still in the stems and it stabbed him in the wrist. Blood came and he dropped the flowers to put his finger over the bleeding place. He felt his pulse throbbing with a strong two beat—weak *strong* weak *strong* weak *strong* one *two* one *two* one *two* one *two*. He stood listening to the record with his finger on his pulse and he tried to hear the two beat pulse in the music. But it was not there. The music that he was hearing over the scratch of the needle was not living like the throb of his pulse. It was smooth and good and steady, yes. But it had none of the wonder he felt, holding his finger over his pulse and feeling the urgent life that beat there, under the smooth skin of his wrist.

He listened to himself on the record. He was playing a solo on *Whispering*. The notes slid smoothly up and down the chord. Nowhere did they hesitate or explore or explode with the excitement of discovery. Nowhere did they reach for anything you were not perfectly sure they could reach. Nowhere was there any thinking or feeling or fighting. Nowhere any wonder.

The music was entirely capable and pleasant and—he groped for somebody who might—Mr. Clyde would like it. It was not the kind of music to challenge or upset anybody and Mr. Clyde would like it because Mr. Clyde liked things that did not challenge or upset him. Mr. Clyde would not have to finger his collar in discomfort at what he heard on this record and his Adam's apple would not move up and down convulsively, listening. This was exactly the kind of



music Mr. Clyde could use to sell his product extensively in the south. It would not stir anybody up to make them want something different and nobody would be difficult to handle after listening to this music. When people hear something that seems to promise that life is a fine thing—a fine, strong, two-beat thing, and let's get around to living it that way—people are often very difficult to handle.

Irene never lied and when she said Joe Geddes blew success and money out of his horn, that's what she meant. Joe Geddes was getting difficult to handle again because he was not living as if life were a fine thing, a fine, challenging, bawdy, beautiful thing that you had to think and feel and fight for. And that you had as much right to as the next fellow.

Joe stopped the record because he knew he did not like it. Mr. Clyde might like it. He might like it several thousands of dollars a week worth. But Joe Geddes did not like it. And Mr. Clyde was not there to tell Joe Geddes what he was supposed to like for several thousands of dollars a week. In the silence that filled the room after he had turned the music off, he heard a scratching at the door.

"You want me to get you a doctor, boss?"

Sam's voice was low and pleading and worried.

"I told them you was sick, boss. I told them not to bother you because you was sick. I can get you a doctor, quick as a wink. You want me to get you a doctor?"

Joe did not move away from the phonograph. He did not need a doctor and he did not want anyone to watch over him. Someone to watch over me. That was a good tune. A good, honest Gershwin tune. Maybe he could play that good, honest Gershwin tune on the saxophone.

He went into the bedroom and got out of the closet a saxophone he had not played for a long time. He tested the reed and it was all right. He put the horn in his mouth and began to play. He could play the notes all right. Clear and good in pitch and rhythm. But the horn in his mouth felt just like

a horn in his mouth. His lips gave it nothing and it gave nothing back to his lips. It was a dead thing and he was a dead thing. He felt a dull pain of failure because he remembered other times when he could say easily what he wanted to say on the horn, as if the notes were simple English monosyllables. "I hear the horn. Do you hear the horn? What does the horn say? It says I hold the gift of life in my mouth. Death is a bad man who dares not come near me when I play. I hear the horn. I hear the horn."

He heard nothing but himself playing *Someone to Watch Over Me*, three times through, capably and clearly, with even rather ingenious twists to the improvisation. But the heart and the brain from which the excitement, the wonder, the exploring—the thinking, feeling, and fighting—should have come, were not functioning. They were smudged with brown around the edges. They were dying and they were lonely in their dying because Joe had gone away and left them. Irene had gone away and left them, too.

The scratching at the door had stopped now and everything was very still. Joe laid the saxophone down on the bed and sat down himself and smoked a cigarette. His head was quite clear now. Against the bedroom window he heard the inquiring fingers of the rain and the indolent flapping of the shade in the wind which was a gentle and Spring wind. He went over to the window and raised the shade. He stood looking out at the night which was full of the rain's inquiring fingers, touching him gently and saying Come away where the rain comes from . . . the truthful and honest and quiet rain . . . the gentle and peaceful and honest rain . . . the living and honest and begetting rain. He wanted to go to the rain which no man controlled and which spent itself with a gentle rhythm which few men heard. Joe Geddes heard it now and it was a fountainhead, a source, a spring of life of which no man was aware because no man saw the things that would grow when the rain was through until the rain was past and forgotten.

Joe Geddes took off his tails and put on his coat and went to the door of the sitting room. He heard nothing, so he opened the door quietly. There was no one in the hall. He went down in the service elevator, walked to the Lexington Avenue entrance very quickly and found a cab.

"Harlem," he said to the driver.

He heard the chimes of the Metropolitan tower strike eleven—eleven steady, hollow sounds in the black, wet night. A quiet excitement was coming to life inside him. He was moving in the gentle rain to end something and to begin something. He did not know what he was going to begin or how. But he knew what he was going to end. He was going to end the existence of the driven and acquiescent and successful man who was Joe Geddes. He had not become a Big Stick to beat himself to death. He would show her that he had not. He was smudged with brown around the edges, but he could still stab his living pulse to bleed blood.

He got out of his cab at 125th Street because he saw the sign on the marquee of the Apollo Theater and the sign said "Coleman Hawkins and his Orchestra." He did not want to go in, but he found himself paying the cab driver and going in. The band was on the stage and Joe stood in back and listened. The audience did not want Coleman Hawkins to stop playing. They were shouting requests and many of them were requests for *Body and Soul*. *Body and Soul* was a lovely, lush, rich song that had been written by a white man named Johnny Green, but the crowd knew that a black man named Coleman Hawkins could play a tune like *Body and Soul* with a terrible, sad urgency no white man ever put into it and so they wanted him to play it.

Coleman Hawkins smiled, up there on the stage, and turned his shoulder toward the band. The men took the downbeat on *Body and Soul* and Hawkins waited quietly, with a smile on his lips and his eyes half closed, until they had come to the place where he was to play. Then he closed his eyes and put the horn in his mouth.

What he played was more than what he had played in Joe's apartment that night in Chicago so many years ago. What he played filled the darkened auditorium of the Apollo Theater in Harlem with light and life and the inquiring fingers of the rain. His audience knew, whether they were aware of it or not, that Coleman Hawkins was playing something they knew about and felt. A thing he could express and they could not. They loved him for expressing it for them and they felt, momentarily, that they could go out and express their own thing for themselves.

Joe Geddes left the Apollo. He walked to Lenox Avenue, looking for a place to sit down. He tried several bars on the way uptown. They were full of smoke and the easy surge of Negro voices talking and the music of jukeboxes. The music and the voices seemed to Joe to be indistinguishable one from the other. In both, there was a strong vitality that was waiting to be used. They did not sound like the music and the voices at the Roof of the Waldorf Astoria where the sounds were neither strong nor vital because they had been used too much. Too much over and over again and not getting any better. The sounds at the Waldorf Roof were hysterical sounds made too high above the street by people too far removed from the dangerous, steady beat of good red blood in man's pulse, there under the smooth skin of his wrist.

Sometimes the jukebox played one of his own records and he thought Here is the Waldorf come to Harlem, for his music sounded like something which was neither strong nor vital because it had been used too much. The people in these smoky bars did not listen much to his records. They would turn their heads and listen if it was a Basie or a Lunceford or an Ellington record. Would people turn their heads and listen if it was Basie or Lunceford or Ellington playing at the Waldorf? Why were they not playing at the Waldorf instead of Joe Geddes? Because Basie or Lunceford or Ellington would not sell our product extensively in the Waldorf, he supposed.

In the last bar he tried, a fellow recognized him.

"Hi, Joe," he said. "What you doin' uptown?"

He was a boy from Ellington's band. Joe knew him perfectly well, but right now he could not draw the name out of his seeking mind.

"Just looking around," Joe said. "How're things?"

"Okay."

"Where you working now?"

"We go to St. Louis soon as I get my raise."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Oniest way I can get a raise out of that white man manager is to hock my horn. So it's hocked. Then, I don't get my raise, I can't play. I get the raise, I go get the horn out of hock. I need that raise. I'm a family man now."

"Well, good luck, boy," Joe said because that was the kind of thing you said. "How about a drink to celebrate?"

They had several drinks and then they left for a place this fellow was telling Joe about. Joe hadn't been to Harlem in a long time, and he didn't know the places any more. But this fellow knew a place where the music was good, he said, so they went there. Maybe if he could just sit and listen to the good music, he would find out what it was he had to begin. Maybe he'd feel he was at home again, and could go someplace from there. You couldn't go any place from no place. You had to go home first. Then you could go someplace else. When you were ready and knew where it was you wanted to go.

The place was just off Lenox at 134th Street. There was no name on the door and no neon lights. You went down seven or eight steps and there it was. The round tables were scarred with little black lines where cigarettes had burned themselves out. The chair Joe sat in had a broken back that had been wrapped around with wire. Behind him on the wall somebody had painted two bulbous figures with blue and yellow paint. A balloon, like the ones in the comic strips, came out of the mouth of one of the figures. In the balloon were scrawled the words, "Plant me now and dig me later."

There were not many people, but they looked the way Joe remembered they ought to look, quiet and listening and relaxed, none of them bright and eager and restless with the necessity of making an impression on somebody else. The table next to him was vacant, but at the one beyond a very black Negro boy sat with his arm around a girl. She was the beautiful, warm color of coffee with enough cream in it and when she looked at the man and smiled, her teeth were very white. They had come to listen to the music and they felt at home, listening. They were at home, together, listening. Joe listened, too, but he didn't feel at home. Something was missing. Joe knew what it was that was missing, but he was not quite ready to admit that he knew.

The music was, as this fellow had said, very, very good. There were six men on the stand: two white—two kids on piano and trumpet—and four black, on drums and sax and trombone and bass. They were playing an original tune and they weren't playing any old worn-out licks in it. It had a fine, strong, well-directed form to it and it was very exciting. It had a careless, almost offhand brilliance about it, a mad, shooting star simplicity. But it was not careless or mad. It only seemed so because it was so unexpected, so unfamiliar. Joe could hear that it moved with a beautiful, satisfying balance towards its inevitable end.

They were playing together in rich layers of sound. Playing together, but not in the wild, individual way he had played back in Chicago. Their rich layers of sound moved away from each other, then came together again, like dancers. The sax man changed to clarinet and played a thin line for the others to romp around. Then he changed back to sax, played in the low register, with a wonderful series of trills. The trumpet came in suddenly like the flash of a knife in the sun. He tossed off a passage full of triple tonguing, and finished with a long, full-throated, perfectly resolved phrase. The walls of the place vibrated like a heart with the rhythm.

They stopped after a brilliant, full ensemble coda, and

laid down their instruments casually, as if they had done nothing remarkable. This fellow with Joe said, "Solid."

"Yeah," Joe said.

It was still going on then. There were men—and kids—still playing the music like that in the same places where Joe had played it when he still played the music like that. He felt old and tired and heavy with loss now that they had stopped. He wanted them to play again and bring back the blood to his oldness and tiredness and heaviness. But they were lighting cigarettes, and calling to the waiter, and the sax man and the trombone man and the trumpet kid went over and stood beside the table two tables away from Joe, where the big Negro sat with his arm around the coffee colored girl. All of them talked together, earnestly, and then the girl got up and walked over to the stand, and started to sing.

"My man don't love me, treats me awful mean,  
My man he don't love me, treats me awful mean,  
He's the meanest man I've evah seen. . . ."

Joe's heart tightened in a fist in his chest. Behind her, the band was playing with a low-down ease that had not been in their other playing at all. This was something different and they played it different.

"If you treat me right, baby, I'll stay home ev'ry day,  
If you treat me right, baby, I'll stay home ev'ry day,  
But you're so mean to me, baby, you're gonna drive me  
away. . . ."

"Boys sure got the miseries, playing like that," this fellow with Joe said.

"Yeah," said Joe. She wasn't singing the words to him. She wasn't making up any words just for him. All she was doing was singing the blues. The heart-warming, honest, misery-expressing blues. She did not sound in the least like

Irene Jaynes singing the blues. They were her blues, and she was singing them her way. But when there were good, honest blues being sung, you weren't ashamed to admit what you knew was missing. Joe Geddes wasn't ashamed to admit it now. She was missing and he was not at home when she was not with him. The music was empty and dead when she was not with him. He knew it. He thought it and he felt it and he would fight for it.

"Love is just like a faucet, it turns off and on,  
Love is just like a faucet, it turns off and on,  
Sometimes when you think it's on, baby, it's done turned  
off and gone. . . ."

Joe got up from his broken chair. He wasn't listening to the words or the music either any more. He had just remembered, with a clear, frightening certainty, that his love was in danger. She was going to marry somebody else, she had said. That was impossible. She couldn't marry anyone else.

"Hey, where you going?" the Ellington man called after him.

But Joe was on his way to the door. He had to hurry or he might be too late.



## Chapter XXI

BY THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, IRENE knew that she would have to do something about it. She would have to do two things about it.

We are not the hysterical type, she confided to the woman with the reddened eyes and the mouth full and loose from crying and biting the lips—the woman who looked back at her from the dressing table mirror. We are sitting here, surrounded by cigarette butts and memories, with all four of our legs aching from the several miles we have walked between here and the end of the living room since eleven o'clock. We are wearing these two beautiful mandarin coats he gave us because we stumbled blindly to the hall closet at 1 A.M. and put them on for comfort. Only it wasn't any comfort, wearing the mandarin coats he gave us, and the metal threads are going to tarnish from the tears that have been spilled on them.

We behaved fine at the broadcast. Just saying, no, when they asked if we knew where he might be. Calm. When everybody else was running around as if the end of the world had come. Trying to get him on the phone. Saying very nasty things about him, but finally believing it when Sam insisted that he wasn't feeling so good. We were fine then, weren't we? Disinterested. Not caring. Even convincing ourselves that it didn't concern us at all. We had nothing to do with it at all. Then beginning to go gently to pieces, little pieces of panic, in the cab coming home. What time was it when we finally decided we'd have to try his hotel? Just the friendly interest of an old friend. An old friend ought to call up and see how the sick man is, for heaven's sake! Even though he might be sick enough again

so that he couldn't get married again and that was a bitter memory. Now it didn't matter whether he could get married or not, did it? *Did* it?

No, of course it didn't matter and that is why we are sitting here now, at 3 A.M. in the morning, knowing that, in not more than five minutes, we will have to do something about it. We will have to do two things about it. We know now that it is our fault because of this afternoon. He could not face the definite break by himself. He could never face anything by himself and never will. And no reason why he should. Let the other guys be big and strong and able to face things by themselves. Let him just be Joe. No, that doesn't make sense. A man's got to be a man, hasn't he? But not alone. How can a man be a man alone?

Irene reached out her hand to powder her face. So did the lady in the mirror. They both turned their heads to look at the powder box that played *Alexander's Ragtime Band* when you lifted its lid and released the music. Both of them looked better with a little powder on their puffy faces. A little lipstick helped, too. Now we are ready to do the two things that must be done.

Irene got up and went out to the phone in the hall. She dialed calmly and waited while the bell buzzed. She felt fine now. It certainly helped when you knew what you had to do—and began doing it. The sleepy voice at the other end of the wire said, "H'llo."

"Bo? I'm in a terrible state, Bo," Irene said. "Joe didn't show up at all tonight for the broadcast."

"What's that? Sorry, dear. Didn't quite get you. Still full of sleep, I guess."

"I said Joe didn't show up tonight for the broadcast."

"Oh? What happened?"

"I don't know. I'm in a terrible state."

"Don't get it. He hurt or something?"

"I don't know. I wish I knew."

"I still don't get it. What makes it so important to you

that you've been crying? You *have* been crying, haven't you, darling?"

"Yes. Yes, damn it, I've been crying. And I know what makes it so important to me. I—"

"I'd better get down there and take you out for coffee or something."

"That would be fine, Bo. Would you?"

"What do you mean, would I? Of course I would. Take me about ten minutes. Wait for me."

She hung up and went in and sat on the chintz love seat and fell asleep. When Bo rang, she wakened, with a start. It was three-thirty. She could face three-thirty. Even when Bo put his big arms around her and kissed her, she knew she could face it now.

"Darling, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"It's an awful thing, Bo. I've got to find him."

He looked down into her face very steadily.

"He knew about us?"

She nodded.

"I see," he said. "This begins to make some sense. Want to talk about it?"

"Yes, I do. I have to talk to you about it, Bo. You see, I—"

"This will go better with coffee. Any in the kitchen?"

"No. As usual, no. I forgot to get any."

"Okay. Hop into your coat. Can't wear that thing on the street."

They drove over to Broadway and found an all-night place. They had food with their coffee. Eggs. Bo insisted on it. When they had eaten, he said, "Okay, dear. What was it you wanted to say?"

She could tell that he knew, though. He had just been putting it off as long as possible, and now it wasn't possible to put it off any longer.

"I'm not going to be able to marry you, Bo."

He let out a long breath, as if he had been holding it till

now on the assumption that if he didn't breathe that long breath it would somehow hold back her breath that was going to say those words. It was not easy for her to look at him and say it, but that was the way it was going to have to be, for both of them. So she sat and watched his bent head and the finger that kept moving up and down the tines of a fork, up one tine and down the other, up one and down the other.

"I can't even say I'm sorry, Bo, because I know that pity is the last thing you'll ever need. You know how to take care of things—all the things about living and loving that are such problems to Joe and me, that we've had to fight with and against and for. But we've done it together too long, and I can't get free of it now."

"You going to marry him?"

"I don't know. I've got to find him first. Then we'll see."

He picked up the fork and held the curved part between his strong fingers till it bent.

"I know what you mean," he said. "Damn it, I wish I didn't. It would make it easier for me to try to change your mind if I didn't. I love you very much, Irene."

"I know you do. I know you do, Bo! And I love you, too. I love you dearly. Only not like Joe. Not to marry."

He raised his head and the softness and the strength were still in his face. It was very pale, that was all.

"You love me like a brother. Sounds like a wisecrack, but isn't. There's a lot of different kinds of love and you're capable of all of them, Irene. Not everybody is. Only I wish it was me you loved like a man."

"Maybe it's because you love me like a little girl. Remember how you said you wanted to take care of me like a little girl?"

"Yes. I would like to, too."

"The trouble is, I'm not a little girl, Bo. That's the one thing I hope you'll forgive me for—getting mixed up and thinking I wanted to be treated like a little girl. Getting

mixed up for long enough to get you mixed up, too. I wish I hadn't done that. I hope you'll forgive me for doing that, Bo."

"It was natural enough, dear."

"Natural! What's so wonderful about being natural if you don't know what you're being natural about? No, Bo, that wasn't natural for me at all. That was unnatural for me. And I wish I hadn't got you mixed up in it with me."

"It's okay, dear."

"Yes, damn it, I know. I know it's okay with you. You'll be sad and disappointed, but if it wasn't about this it would be about something else probably. And what's so unusual about being sad and disappointed? What makes people think life is such a dream that it's unusual to be sad and disappointed? I'll probably be sad and disappointed myself—if I can't find Joe!"

He smiled a little, and he let the fork drop to the table.

"Now you sound like the old fighting Irene," he said. "You were different with me. You weren't fighting. You just quit and went along with me. That's why it wouldn't have been any good. I see that now, damn it!"

He reached in his pocket for money to pay the check, moving easily and without strain. Only his face was still too pale and the muscles under the high cheekbones were held too taut.

"Irene," he said, "suppose I said why don't we skip that sadness and disappointment we're bound to feel and get some happiness for ourselves instead?"

She shook her head slowly.

"We wouldn't get any, Bo. I could face the sadness and disappointment other people bring me. I couldn't face them if I knew I'd brought it on myself."

"Yeah," he said. "Just thought I'd try the idea. Didn't really believe in it myself. Let's go, shall we?"

"Where to? I don't know where to go to find him really."

He had his coat on now and was holding hers for her.

"I didn't mean that. I won't help you find him, Irene. I'm no saint. I'm not going to be a good loser about this. I'm even going to be a bum sport. I have a right to be a bum sport, the way I figure it."

She patted the hand that held her coat for her.

"Yes," she said. "You have a right to be a bum sport. I don't suppose I really expected you to help me find him. I'd have taken advantage of you, probably, if I could have. But if you were the kind I could take advantage of, we probably wouldn't have had the whole conversation in the first place. Take me home, Bo."

He left her at the door.

"Get some sleep, kid," he said. "He's probably all right. Probably just been doing the bars, ever since he found out about us. You better get some sleep, kid."

"Do you want to know what happens, Bo?"

He had got out of the car to open the door for her. Now he slid back under the wheel, across the empty front seat. He looked at the wheel for a moment and at his hands lying quietly along the rim of it.

"Yes," he said. "I'd like to know what happens finally and for sure."

He held out his hand, and they shook on it. Then he drove away, very fast, with a sudden roar of mechanical pain in the quiet street.

When Irene reached her own living room again, she saw that her mandarin coat was stretched out across the sofa and that Joe lay under it, sound asleep. An individual tear welled up in each eye, but did not fall. Just lay there, behind her lids, holding in happy suspension the next thing that had to be done. It could wait a while. Not too long, but a while. She curled up on the chintz love seat and pulled her tweed coat over her. She was not sleepy now, so she lay and watched him for a few minutes, for the few minutes that passed before he turned uneasily, shifted his position, opened his eyes, and saw her across the room. His eyes closed auto-

matically, but he opened them again, opened them and looked at her for a long time. Then he got up, letting the mandarin coat slip to the floor and stay there. He came over to where she lay, got down on his knees and gathered her in his arms. He knelt there, rocking her gently back and forth, rocking with her.

"I thought you'd never come home, honey," he muttered into the soft hollow of her throat. "I was afraid something awful had happened to you, Irene . . . Irene . . . Irene . . . Irene. . . ."

She did not disturb the motion until it had spent itself. When it had, he released her, still very gently, and sat on the floor beside her.

"Whatever you want to say or do about it is all right now, honey," he said. "I just had to find my way home to you first. I had to take a chance on finding you and telling you that you couldn't marry anybody else but me. That it would be impossible. I nearly went frantic, waiting for you. But then I lay down under your coat that I gave you and I thought about the way it had been with us for such a long time. And then I thought, after all, where did I get off, talking to you like that, after the way I've been acting! I thought up my piece to say and then I guess I went to sleep. Anyhow, honey, that's the way it is. I came down here all full of fight and fright and I was going to move mountains and all like that. Now, I don't know. You got a right to marry the guy if you want to. Jesus, it would probably be better for you all around. He's the steady, easy-going kind. He wouldn't make you any problems. He'd take care of everything for you."

"Yes, he would, Joe."

"Not like me. Jesus, I never know what to do, if it isn't in B Flat. Only now I know one thing. Listen to me, Irene, and then you say or do whatever you want to. I know now what I want, and it's for you never to be away from me at all—not on the road, or when I'm too busy or at all. I want to be related to you by marriage. I mean for you to be

really and definitely my family by marriage. And I want to get out of this whole racket right away before I go nuts and can't play anything at all any more. Later, maybe I'll look around and see what to do. Oh, yes—and Bobby can have the band the way it stands. He's always fronted it before, when I was away or sick. He knows as much about it as I do. And one other thing. I want to back Cozy and Pug in a band of their own like they deserve. Well, that's the piece I thought up to say to you, Irene. Now you can do or say whatever you want, honey. Oh, about the new radio show. That's out. That's all, honey."

"I'm not going to marry him, Joe. I just got through telling him so."

He looked at her, hard.

"You mean without seeing me or anything? You decided that yourself, without ever knowing a thing about me or my piece I just said or anything? You decided it by yourself?"

"He was here a while ago. We went out to eat and I told him. But no, I didn't decide it by myself, Joe. You helped me to decide it, I guess, because—well, just because you exist, damn you!"

"Now wait a minute. Not so fast. This is a little too much for me. You're not going to marry the other guy. That's definite and you're sure."

"It's definite and I'm very sure, Joe."

He sat for a minute, perfectly still, his forehead creased in three lines, his eyes half closed. Then he leaned forward and put his head in her lap.

"Oh, Jesus God and Mary," he said quietly to himself.

She stroked his hair until his shoulders stopped shaking and she could feel the damp of his tears through her skirt. She was crying, too, quietly, but with the same ecstasy of relief.

"Look, Joe," she said, softly and steadily, when she could talk. "You're not going to run out on the job. You've got a theater opening at eleven o'clock this morning, remember—



and a hotel job to finish. I'll finish them with you, if you like—and then we'll get married and get away and be people again. Okay, Joe?"

He raised his head and straightened to his knees and looked at her.

"I'm afraid to go back there," he said. "I'm afraid if I go back there, it'll start all over again. I'm afraid of it starting all over again."

"You're not afraid, Joe," she said. "It's just that you know what it is now. You know what it is you have to fight for now. Get off your knees. Stand up on your hind legs and you'll see you're not afraid."

He got to his feet, a little uncertainly. To steady himself, he stretched his arms up and let them fall in wide arcs to his sides. Then he shook his head to clear it, breathing in and out deeply.

"You're right!" he said, and the wonder in his voice was a sure wonder. "I'm not afraid. Not afraid at all."

He was standing very straight and steady now and he held out his hands and looked at them as if they had something to do with his not being afraid.

"I'm not afraid to do it my way from here on in and if they like it, fine, and if they don't like it, I'm still going to do it my way," he said to his waiting hands. "They're not going to push us around any more," he told his hands. "Listen, there's a lot of music in me that I haven't even got down to yet. It'll take me a while. Even after I get off the merry-go-round it'll take me a while."

With his still extended hands, he reached down and pulled Irene to her feet.

"Listen, honey, I'm going to quit the music business. You hear me? I'm not afraid to quit the music business. And you and me are going to build us a house out of old piano boxes, some place away off, where we'll never hear the scratch of those tired old pens signing my life away on those tired old contracts. For years. Maybe five. Maybe ten. Maybe a hun-

dred. We're not going to listen to that tired old music I been playing any more. Not till I hear that stuff in me that I haven't even got down *to* yet. That stuff that's buried under all that tired old moola."

He pulled her closer to him.

"I'm going to put reeds in your hair and play *you*, honey," he said. "Stuff like this . . ." and he laid his lips against her hair.

A succession of sounds came from his lips—reedy, throaty sounds, in a series of little phrases, hot and tender, moving into music with the sure grace of bud unfolding into flower.

Irene stood quietly, waiting, until the sounds died away and became a kiss so gentle it was no more than a breath in her hair.

He stepped back, but he did not release her hands.

"Okay," he said. "Let's get back and finish up those damned jobs. Me and my dead horn."

She still stood there, waiting, looking at him across their clasped hands, seeing this new thing, this fine thing, this musician who now walked like a man.

"Your horn's not dead, Joe. Just buried."

"It's dead, all right. But it won't always be a dead horn. Some day, honey, when we get our personal living straight again, it'll rise and shine. Rise and shine! It's got to. And hey! You know why it's got to rise and shine again, honey? You know why?"

"No, Joe. Why?"

Awkwardly, he cupped her head in one hand and held it against the place just below his shoulder.

"It just came to me, but it's why, all right. Because there are kids all over the country who are going to learn from me how to play the music, the way I learned from Cozy and Mame. And from records. Bessie and Bix and Louie. Oh, Jesus! Those records of mine. Those late records of mine. Listen, there are kids all over the country learning from those records right now, God help them! Playing them over

and over and learning from them the way I used to do. When the time comes, honey, I'll make better records, too. Not dead. Better. For all those kids to learn from."

He stopped talking then and began to rock her back and forth, back and forth, easily, with a steady, two-beat rhythm.

"Little Gate's a big boy now, Joe," Irene said softly to the place just below his shoulder.





















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